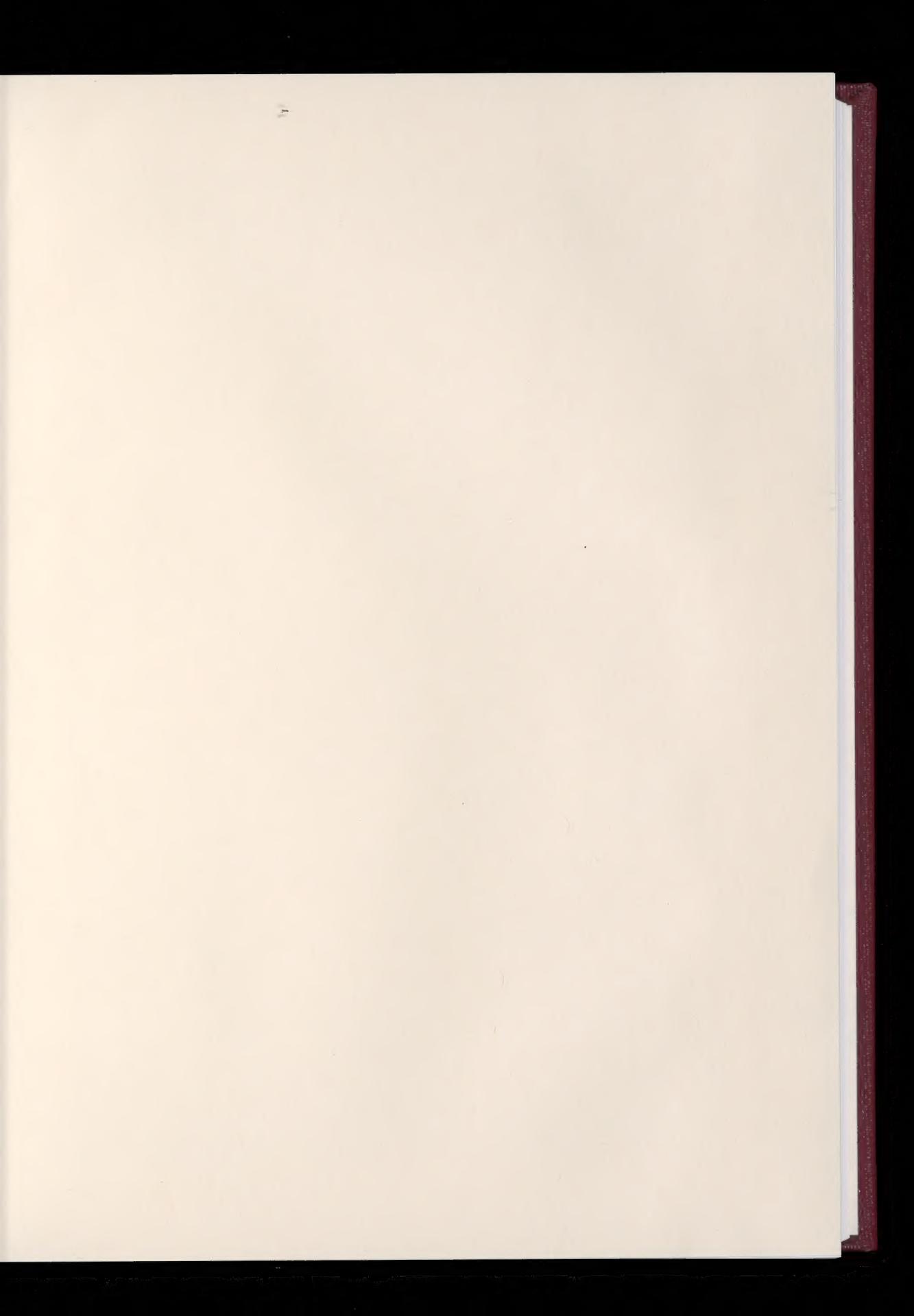


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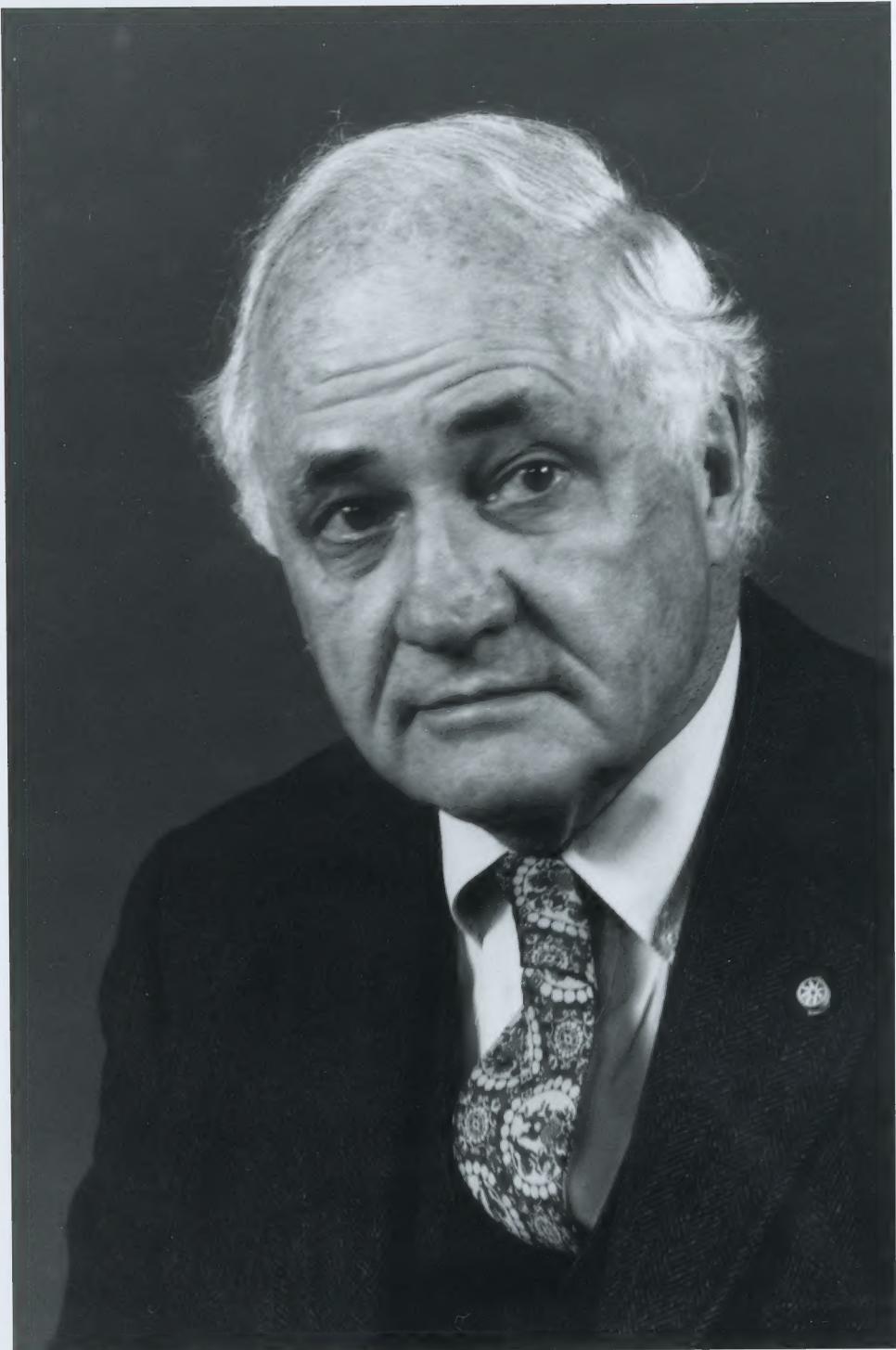












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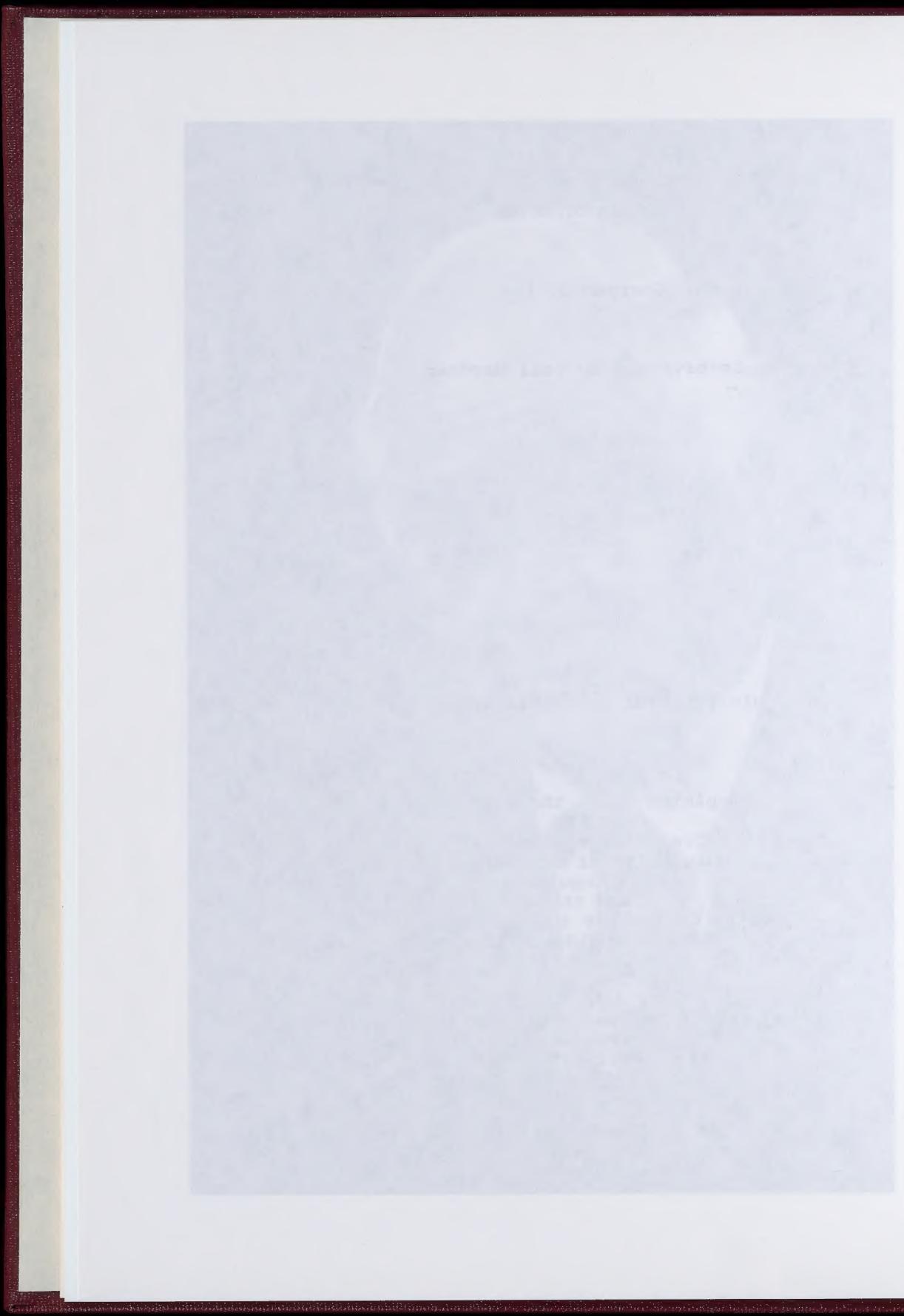
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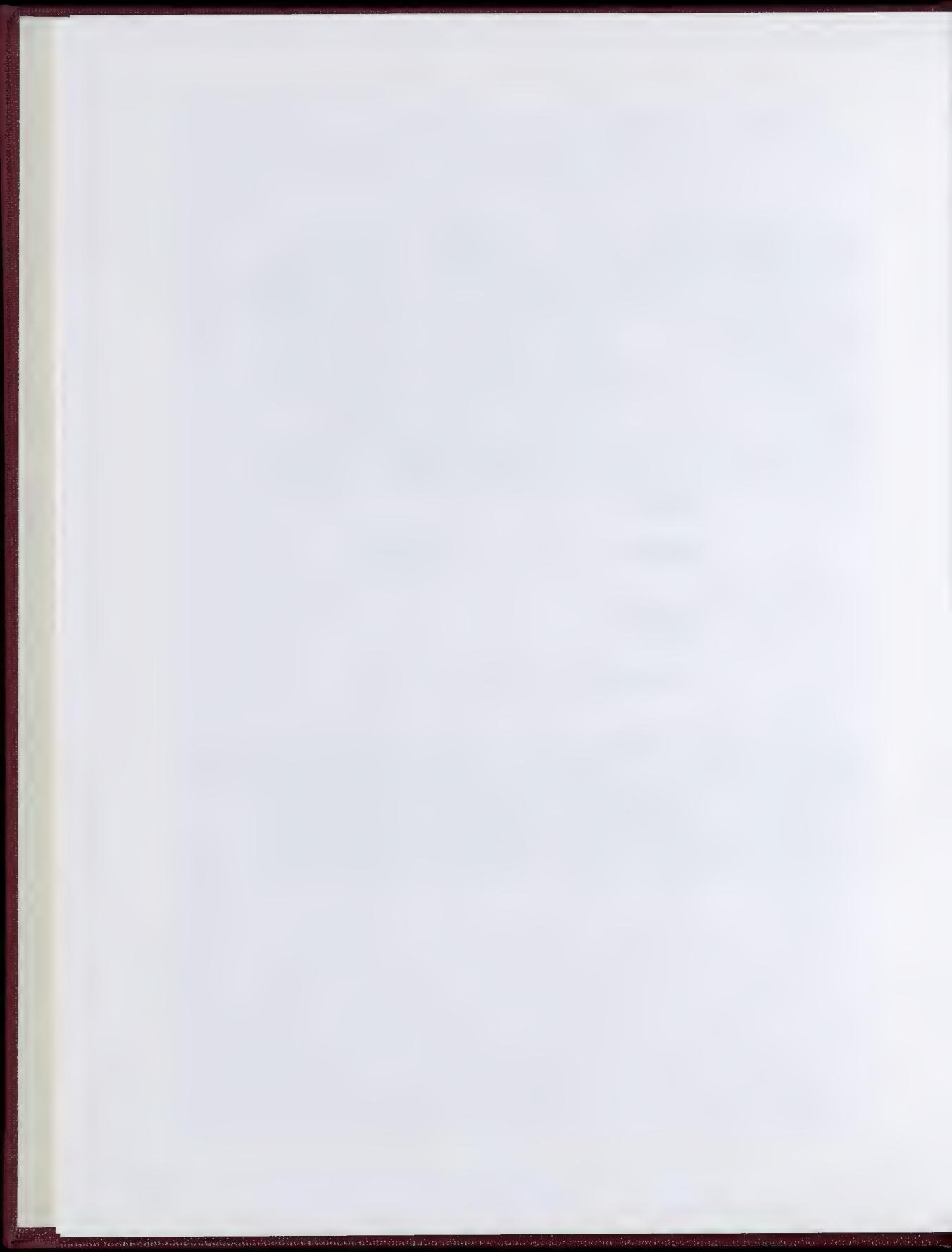
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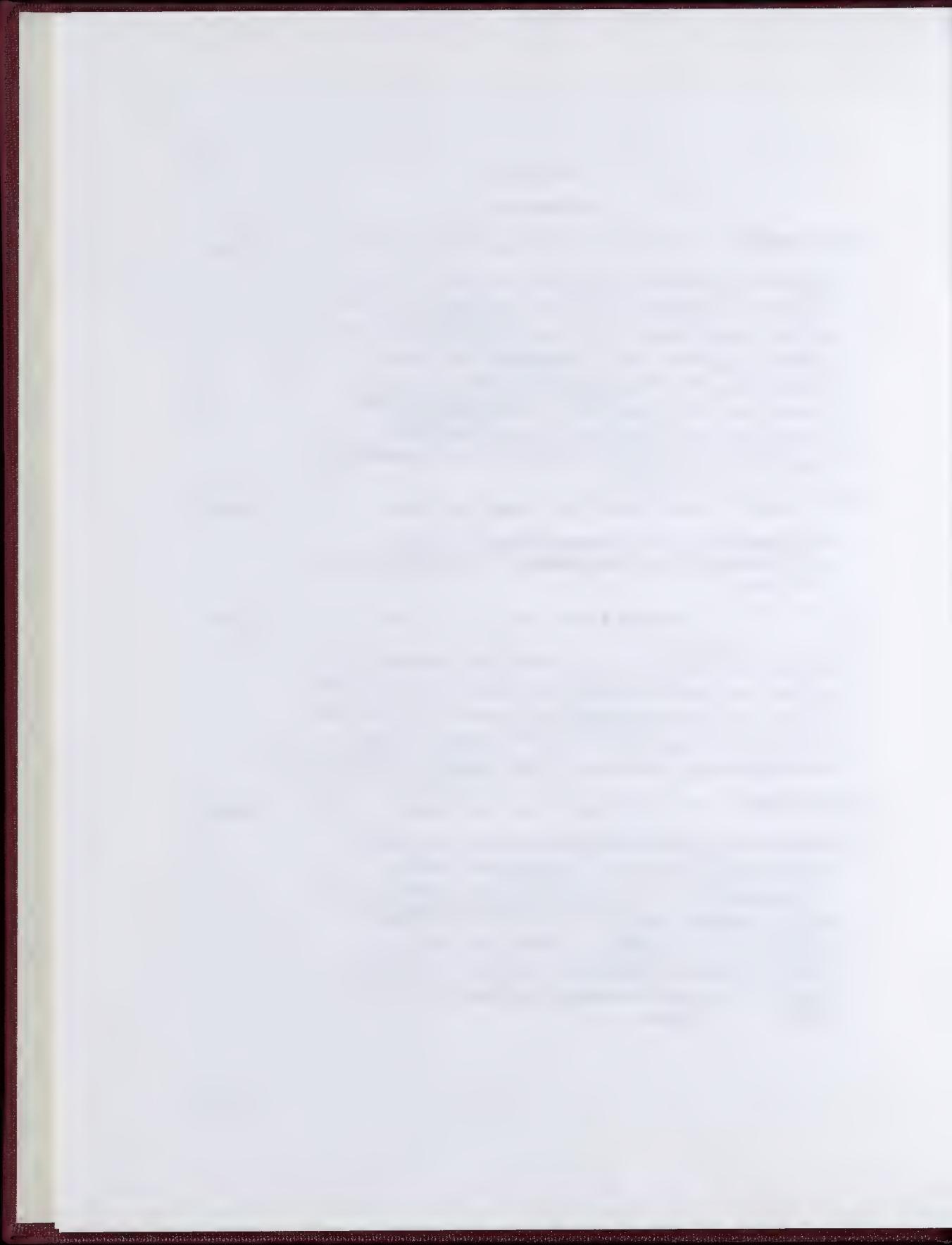
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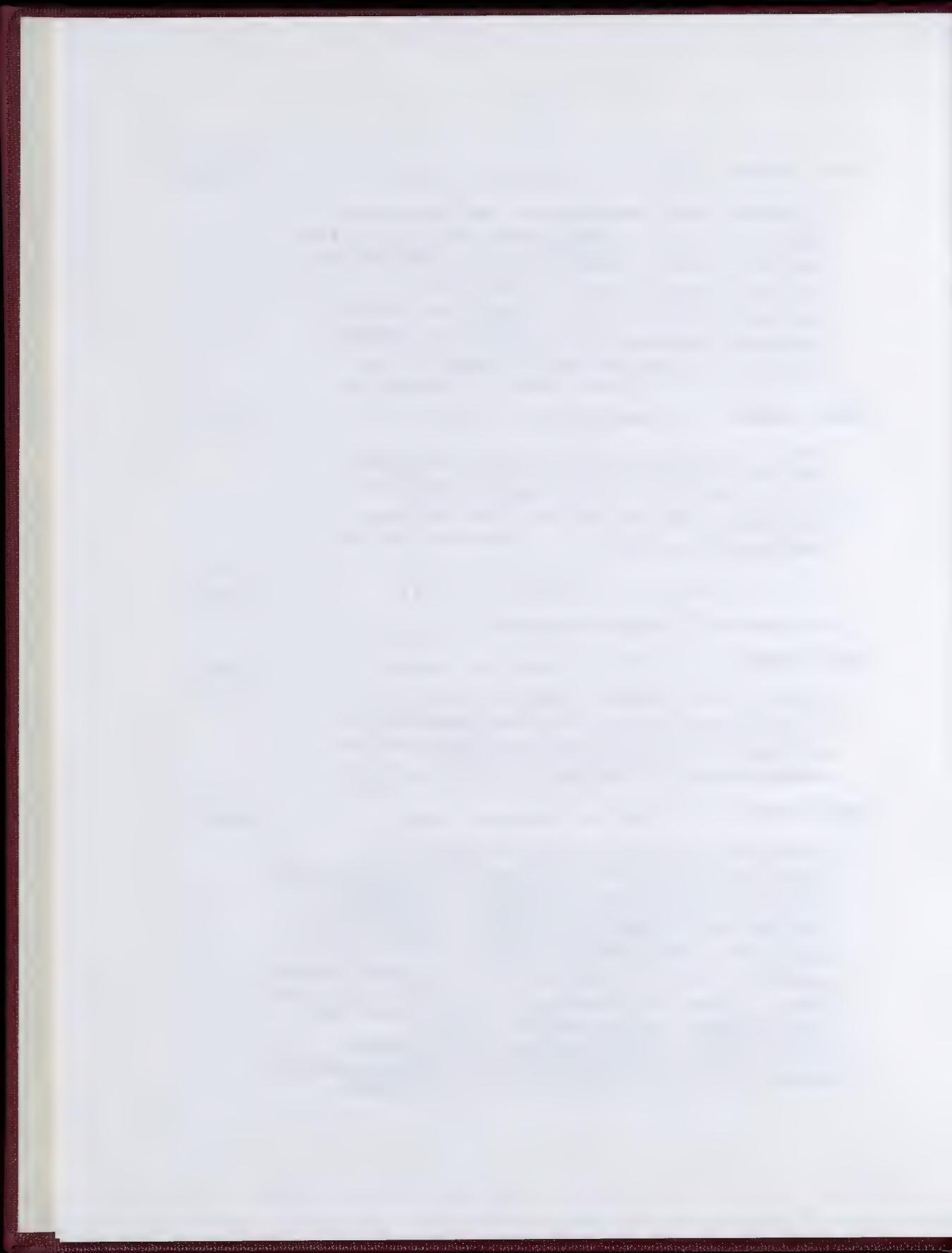
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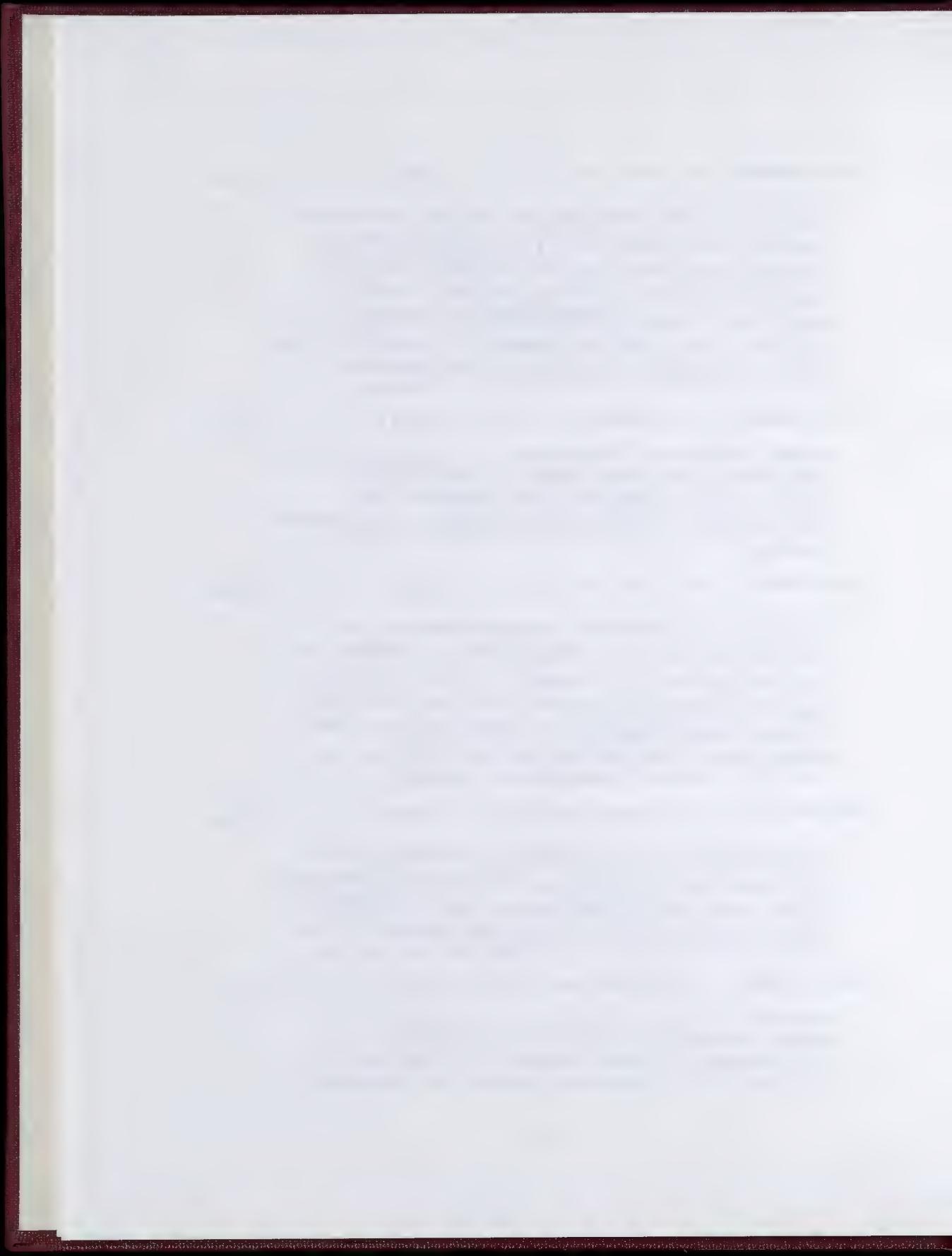
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TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE

JULY 13, 1992

GARDNER: I'll let you finish your thought.

LEE: Yes. We were talking about the skylights [at the Cleveland Museum of Art]. That cost almost \$1 million to refurbish and replace and so forth, and this is back in the days when that would be the same thing as \$2 or \$3 million today. That kind of thing Albert [Grossman] got on top of. There were procedures developed to do it, and a lot of museums, you know, have done the same thing. I think museums are in some ways, for the operation side, better run now than they were long ago. But, you know, you really can tell by walking into a museum. Just walk in the main entrance and take a quick stroll for five minutes around, and you can tell pretty well whether the museum is--in terms of its operations, its physical maintenance, cleaning and so forth--being done right or whether something's funny or wrong. But all of these things worked together. They all interleaved and were all made possible because of the new responsibilities of the museum, with its new endowments and its new wing and its capacity to develop collections and programs, acquire objects, take care of them, educate people about them, have exhibitions--all these things. And it took a lot of



pushing and pulling and hard work to get it going fairly smoothly.

GARDNER: You wanted to talk next about restructuring the collection. I think that fits in neatly here.

LEE: Yes, well, the reorganization of the collections and of the departments was something that we thought about but couldn't do anything much about under the dispensation as it was from '58 with the completion of that new wing until we began seriously planning for the next new wing, the one that was to be done by Marcel Breuer and Hamilton Smith. But we were thinking about it all the time. There was no logical continuity in the path a person would take through the museum without getting into very curious and sometimes surreal changes of material. Some things had been done, for example, that were caused by the war. In World War II, museums were constantly afraid there were going to be German bombers or whatever you want. For example, in Cleveland, William [M. Milliken]'s greatest treasure, for him, and rightly so, was the Guelph treasure, the great medieval purchase he'd made. It was put down in the basement in a special room, open to the public but reached through a narrow staircase. It was a little bit like going down into a crypt, and there they were down there. But that's where they were presumably safe. Just as a footnote to that, they weren't so safe, because, as the

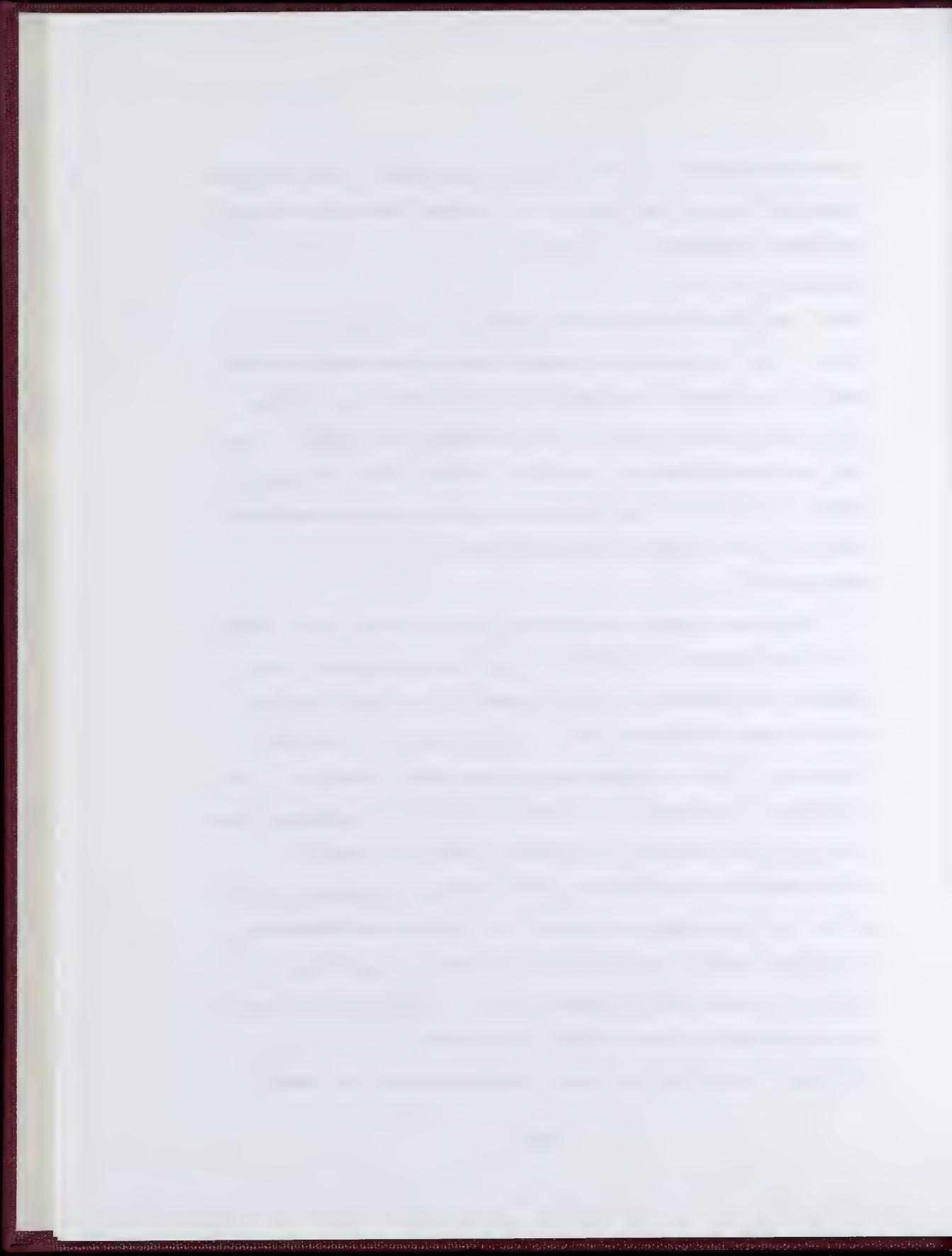


museum discovered in the 'fifties, you know, when we began to get on top of the operations, we had termites through the whole basement of the museum.

GARDNER: Oh, no!

LEE: And they had come with their little tunnels up the walls into the Guelph treasure room and they were eating away at the cases, the wooden parts of the cases, where there were wooden objects too. Anyhow, that cost us. We had the termite people, and they drilled holes through the basement floor into the lower earth and put in chemicals and etc. We finally got rid of them and got that straightened out.

But that's where the Guelph treasure was, down there, and other medieval things were up someplace else. You walked from medieval art, for example, one way, and you would suddenly find yourself in the midst of colonial portraits. Or you would walk in the other direction, and you might-- You would be in medieval art and suddenly find yourself confronting an El Greco. The department of prints and drawings had all their things downstairs in the prints and drawings galleries. All prints and drawings were down there. Not a single drawing was upstairs. Where you might have a painting by a German artist close to Dürer--and we have a Dürer drawing--there was just nothing. There was no really organized plan, in part



because of the way the 1916 building had been designed, with its central core court and then galleries around, but ways back and forth--which made it difficult to have a path--and then the 1958 wing, which went around-- That made things difficult. Then with the [Leonard C.] Hanna [Jr.] money, we were buying wonderful things in modern art, in old master paintings-- Which we must get into, the organization of the collection as part of this.

So we were planning and scheming, and the key to everything to us, in working it over--and Bill [William E.] Ward, the designer, was very, very significant and had significant input into this--was really the location of the educational department and the location of the conservation department and the location of the publications department. All these departments had grown intentionally, but in their original spaces, which were close to or cutting into the space available for galleries. So when it became clear that it was desirable to begin planning for a new wing, the key thing was to provide a totally new environment for the education department and for conservation and for special exhibitions, because the special exhibition gallery was now sort of stuck between permanent collections and other permanent collections in the two different buildings. So the addition was to be thought of as an educational wing.



It was for the education department and for the music department--a new auditorium--and for the special exhibitions, which are, again, very much educational. We talked about it and we sold it to the trustees and we raised some money within the museum family, really, on the term "educational wing." Emery May Norweb was now president of the board. She was a wonderful, dynamic person. Naughty. She had a wonderful sense of humor but she also had a deadpan face, and she could pull your leg until you didn't know, as Harold [T.] Clark used to say, "whether you were on foot or on horseback." She was all for this thing. We went into the financing and we finally-- The 1958 building--I don't know whether I said this--had been started by William Milliken with [J.] Byers Hayes as architect and Harold Clark as president. It had been done on a cost-plus contract. Did I say that?

GARDNER: Yes.

LEE: Okay. Well, for the Breuer wing, we decided on a fixed price and that's it. I was very keen on Breuer's Whitney [Museum of American Art] building. I thought it was wonderful, and Emery May liked it very much. We decided, you know, what's the point of going around and having a competition and all this business? We know what we want and we like that building. He's an architect of considerable renown. Why don't we just decide we're going



to have Breuer do it and then have him come in and work with us? Which is what we did.

Anyhow, the plans for that made it possible, therefore, to move these ancillary--essential, but ancillary--operations within one building, planned especially for them. It freed up enormous areas of space in the old buildings where we could put galleries in that would enlarge the areas where they needed to have sequences and galleries of relationship, so we could envisage a path. A spectator could come in the main entrance, which would now be in the north, and walk through the history of the art of the world, from earliest times to contemporary, one long, continuous flow with occasional escape hatches. (People get a bit tired; they're bored.)

But this also meant we had to have a decision and think about the organization of the collections, because we had the old, traditional imitation of the Boston Museum [of Fine Arts] system: ancient art, medieval art, painting, decorative arts, textiles, prints and drawings, and then oriental art, coming later, because they really didn't have much. And the problem with that is that, for instance, in oriental art you have Sung ceramics, Sung lacquer, Sung painting, Sung sculpture, art seen together in cultural context. In the European area, Spanish



painting was in the armor court, but Spanish textiles were down in the corridor on the ground level, Spanish sculpture and metalwork and decorative arts were someplace else. Medieval art you had somewhat together, but once you began to get into paintings--medieval paintings--they were in the painting department. They were several galleries away.

It seemed to us that the one sort of constant thing was when you're installing a permanent collection, you don't want to keep moving it around. It's dangerous, costs a lot of money, time, effort, work, and so on. The permanent collection should somehow be organized in a way that is reasonably permanent. It's wonderful, and we did that in special galleries in the '58 building. We could pull things from the permanent collection to have a theme show--that's fine--but if you set up a theme show as a permanent collection, as some museums do, where they have, let's say, all their portraits together-- That's wonderful for three months or six months, but when you do it for year after year after year-- It's not how things happened. In Florence in the quattrocento, Pollaiuolo, Verrocchio all had shops that worked in metal, produced sculpture, designed textiles, etc. This was certainly true in medieval art and in oriental art. But it was also true in the West. It was true in the Renaissance.



So we changed the departmental organization so as to remove the artificial distinctions between decorative arts and paintings and [give] a general cultural context. We had ancient art, a department of medieval and Renaissance art with a curator in charge of that, a department of baroque and rococo art, all the art. We had a department of modern art, we had a department of Near Eastern art, and a department of Far Eastern art. We kept the prints and drawings as a separate department with a curator because of the special requirements for storage and for short display because of their evanescent character. We kept the textile department for the same reason, because of their special requirements. But we reserved the right to have curators request material from other departments, where appropriate and safe, to include in the permanent display in the cultural context in which they were produced.

So it was a kind of a combination of chronological and cultural continuity, recognizing that the understanding of a work of art really begins from the specific context of that work of art. This is now a very fashionable concept, but actually it's a very old concept. My first paid professional museum job was in Detroit. [William R.] Valentiner, as I think I said, was a pupil of [Wilhelm von] Bode's. And Bode in the old Kaiser-



Friedrich-[Museum], around 1900, installed the Kaiser-Friedrich in this way. Now, he went, I think, a little too far in trying to establish kind of period rooms, but this was an old, in a sense, scientific way of arranging collections, and that's what we decided to do. We worked like pigs trying to get that worked out in the new spaces we had available, made possible by the Breuer wing.

It all worked together, in the sense that you had to reorganize the departments, the curatorial departments; then you had to organize the collections and the display of the things; then you had your handbook to follow that thing. So there was a real-- What's the word I want? There was an intellectual concept which could be explained, justified, argued for. You can't prove it's the right way to do, but you could make a good case for it. That permeated the whole permanent collection of the museum.

GARDNER: So in that thirteen-year period, then, between your taking on the directorship-- Wasn't it 1971 that the Breuer wing was completed?

LEE: Yes. See, it was '58 to '71. That's thirteen years.

GARDNER: You were all that time laying the groundwork for what would then take place?

LEE: Yes. I would say we weren't thinking about it,



let's say, the day after we finished the arrangements, but it became increasingly evident and clear, the more we worked with it and the more I thought about it, the more I went around studying other museums and so forth, that this was something that had to be studied and done.

GARDNER: Maybe the logical thing to do now is talk about the [Robert] Motherwell purchase and moving into the collection of contemporary art.

LEE: Well, as I think I have said before, when I became director, the museum had no abstract or even semi-abstract paintings in the collection. Well, there was a Preston Dickinson watercolor pastel that had a little touch of abstraction to it, but there was no-- The latest Picasso was 1906. It was a great Picasso, La vie. Blue period. Superb. There were no Braques. There was no Paul Klee. There were things in the print collection, but I'm talking about paintings and watercolors and drawings. I take it back. We had one abstract sculpture, which was a Brancusi--I think I mentioned that--which William Milliken had bought from Joseph Brummer, the dealer in ancient and medieval art. He had a Brancusi show and William bought it. Youth--brass torso.

The trustees were very conservative. I remember when the Picasso exhibition-- Leonard was interested in impressionism, postimpressionism, Picasso's blue period,



rose period. But he was not interested in abstract art or cubism or anything like that. Some of the trustees were actively against it. They hated the Picasso and Braque exhibitions the Museum of Modern Art organized and that came to Cleveland. It was just nothing. So Ed [Edward B.] Henning and I tried to make headway, and it was just very, very difficult. Now, I'm not famous as an avant-garde type, but according to the trustees I was a red-hot radical.

Well, the first couple of years, as I may have mentioned, life was rather difficult for my wife [Ruth Ward Lee] and myself because the older ladies and the trustees' wives or the trustees-- I mean Mrs. Ingalls and Mrs. Wade and others. They remembered William, and here was this young, basically uneducated whippersnapper who came in and-- It was hard. I was fortunate in having the full backing of Harold Clark. Harold was superb and made it possible. But he was not interested in modern art.

Anecdote: Later on, I went to Harold's and he said, "I want you to look at a couple of things." One of them he was using as a doorstop. It was something given him--

RUTH LEE: When he advised the Kelleys Island group.

LEE: Oh, that's right. Yes. Harold had advised-- Who was it?



RUTH LEE: It was a lawyer of that island.

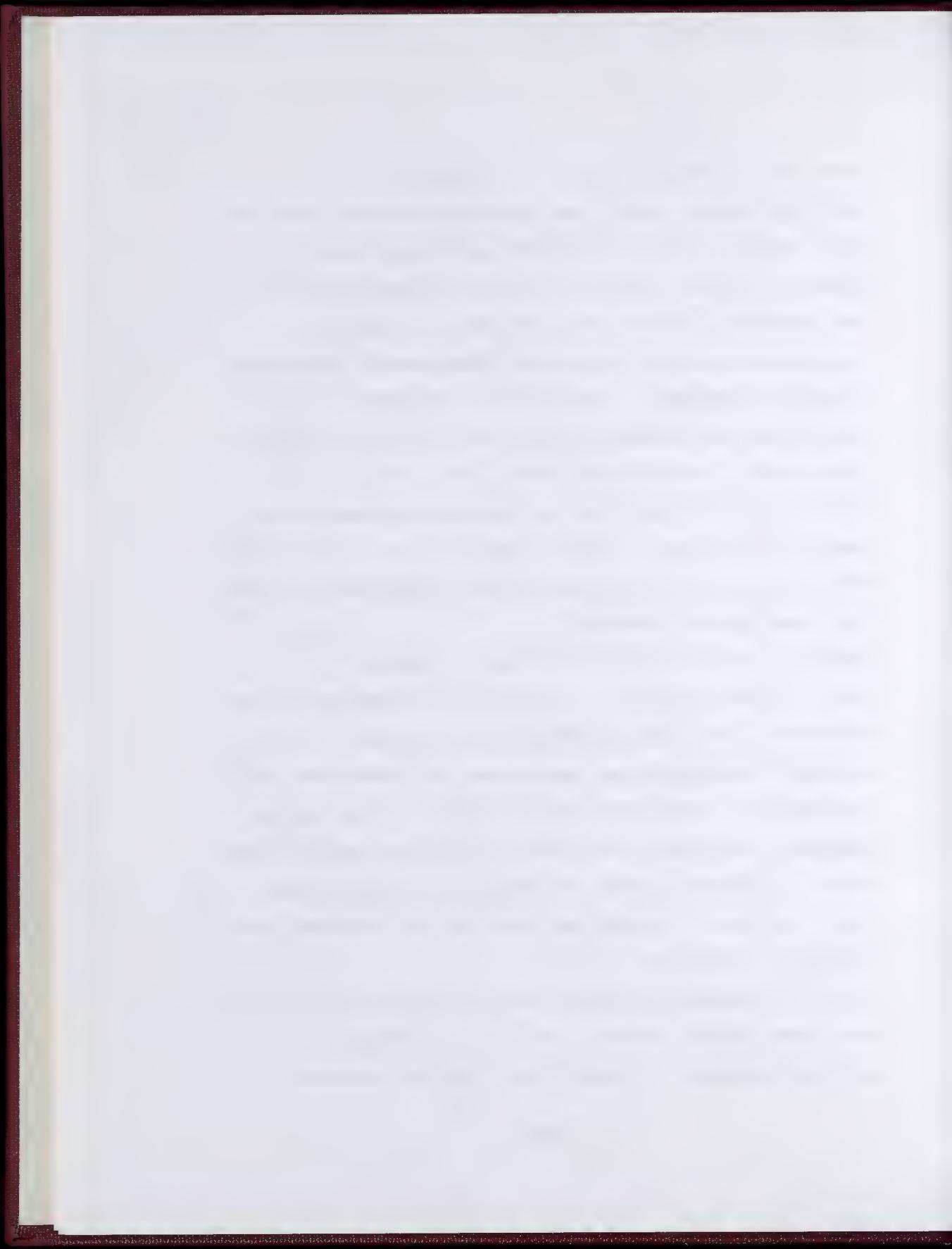
LEE: Oh, that's right. The island out in Lake Erie. He was a lawyer and he had advised the Kelleys Island citizens. It was mixed up with steel companies and the ore companies. He had done some work for them in connection with that island, and they thought that since he was the president of the board of the museum that they'd give him something appropriate. So they gave him this thing. I saw it and I said, "Well, Harold, that's something I think we'd like to have for the museum very, very much." He said, "Well, fine. Take it. It's yours." Well, it was a famous Matisse bronze, which was about two feet high, of two lesbians.

RUTH LEE: Which he didn't realize. [laughter]

LEE: He didn't realize. He didn't like them because they were nude. Mrs. [Mary Sanders] Clark was very, very prudish. He thought they were a man and woman nude, but they weren't. The sculpture's called, I think, The Two Lesbians. But that's the kind of climate we were talking about. So finally I said to Harold and I said to Emery May Norweb and-- I think they were the two principal ones.

RUTH LEE: Severance.

LEE: And Severance Millikin, who hated this stuff too but was a good friend of ours, and he would indulge me if I got very stubborn. I said, "Look, you all hate this



stuff, but believe me, we've got to do something about it. If we don't do something about it, we're going to be the laughingstock of the museum world, which may not be a good reason to you, but it's a pretty good reason, because they will have very good reason to laugh. Why don't you just give Ed and me some money for a year and forget about it? Think of it as gambling money or blackmail money or any way you want to, but just give us something and let us do something with it. And we won't report to you until the end of the year and show you what we've done with it." So they did.

The first sum of money I think was \$15,000. This was in 1959 or 1960, I think. Anyway, about there. We started looking and we saw this Motherwell collage called Mallarmé's Swan. Ed and I thought it was marvelous. I remember it was \$4,500, and a small dealer, Robert Elkon, had it in his apartment. So we bought that. That was \$4,500. Then we bought two or three other things. And that was the first year. The trustees weren't enraged by what we had done. They I think gave us \$25,000 the next year. We got another Motherwell, one of the Elegy for the Spanish Republic series, and the things that I've mentioned in that article in the seventy-fifth anniversary thing. Each year we'd report what we'd done.

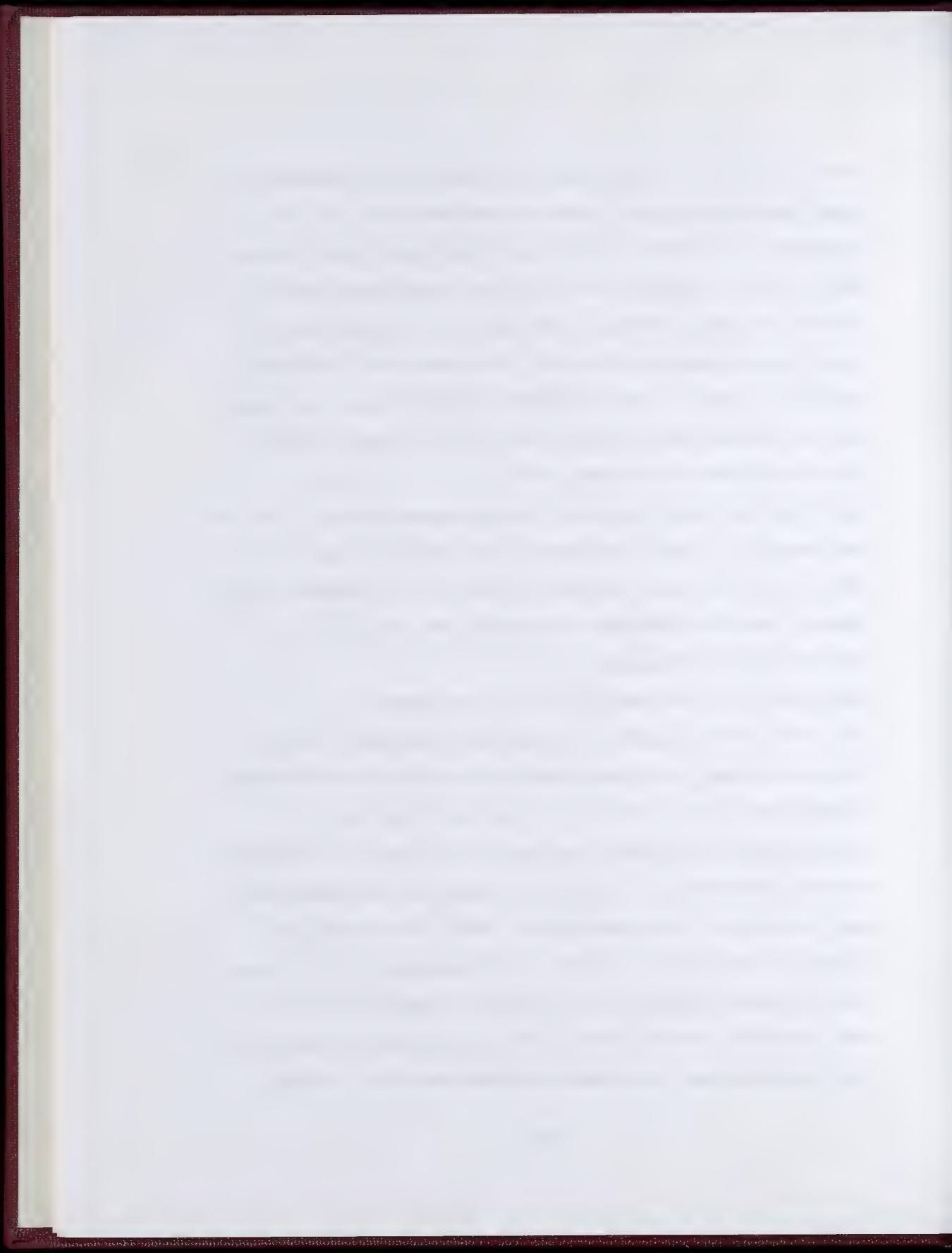
And then the upshot, the sort of cream of the jest



and thing that indicates the attitude of the trustees--at least the conservative, the dominant majority of the trustees-- Oh, maybe it was some five, six, seven, eight years later, we gave a report of the cumulative effect. By then we were spending-- The last year we did this I think the maximum was \$50,000. We showed all the stuff, and then I also, since everybody respects money and they are all interested in money, said, "Now, these are the total funds we've expended, and this is the total conservative market value of this material today." And it was amazing. I mean, you know, 1000 percent higher or something like that. And one of the nicest trustees as a person, Charlie [Charles B.] Bolton, who was in a wheelchair--he had polio--

RUTH LEE: No. He jumped off a diving board.

LEE: Oh, that's right. He paralyzed his back. And Charlie Bolton, in a deep, sepulchral voice from the back of the room, said, "Sell." [laughter] But the significant thing about that was that it sort of broke the back of resistance. Instead of coming up each year with each individual item and rubbing their face in it and having a great battle, which would exacerbate all-- This sort of entering-wedge way of doing it meant that from that time on, we could then seriously present things for fairly large sums, and that's how we were able to get



material like the Picasso Salt Box, Melon, and Fan, which is a great early cubist picture. The other later cubist one-- We got the Braques. The wonderful Picasso '24 still life from Paul Rosenberg. And for those, you know, we paid what seems like small money now. We began to pay prices like \$180,000, \$220,000, \$250,000, and so forth. But we were able to do it.

We encouraged the formation of a Society for Contemporary Art, friends of the museum. They put some little bit of money together, and we had an accessions party so they could vote on three different things. The first party I remember we had, I think we had a [Richard] Stankiewicz and we had, I think, a [William] Baziotes and a [Robert] Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg was Gloria 1954, a very, very tough picture. I think it was something in the neighborhood of \$6,000, something like that, or \$7,000. And they could only buy one. Well, Ed and I sort of fixed it so the Stankiewicz wasn't well lit and the Baziotes was sort of flattened out by florescent light, [laughter] but the Rauschenberg, we jazzed it up a bit. And by golly, they bought it. And that's how we got-- That's a major, major painting of a type that I think we would never have gotten through the accessions committee. Same thing with the [Theodore] Roszak. The Roszak sculpture we got, we sort of rigged that a bit. But it worked, and it was



better, in my judgment. It's better to do that and succeed and develop than it is to have an ugly confrontation and simply slam it down people's throats.

The development of the modern collection at the Cleveland Museum of Art-- If people will take the trouble to go and look at the accession numbers, at the number of works and types of works acquired between 1958 and 1983, they'll see that an awful lot was done. [Mark] Rothko, Morris Louis, you name it. We got a lot of the major painters of the day. But we all agreed that one of the great achievements and wonderful things about the Cleveland Museum of Art and its tradition was balance, that we were representing the art of the world and it was a balanced view. We wanted to develop all of the collections in terms of quality and importance, but to try to achieve some kind of balance. And I think we did in the contemporary field. The thing kept moving ahead of us. In some cases, we didn't get what we wanted.

We were able to get a Jackson Pollock, a very good one, #5, because I had told the Museum of Modern Art-- I knew they were occasionally deaccessioning duplicate material in order to get very expensive new material. Bill [William] Rubin called me up and said they had to deaccession #5 and was I interested, because they were going to buy a Kandinsky, I think, which was some



millions. I said, "Sure." We were able to get it at a reasonably good figure. It certainly is not as great a picture as Blue Poles or Lavender Mist or you name it, but it's a very fine one, and it would never have been there and we would never have had one if we hadn't had to go through that long period of both guerrilla war and subversion.

GARDNER: Reeducation. [laughter] Who comprised the acquisitions committee?

LEE: Well, it varied, but there were usually, I think, eleven members. They were all trustees and they were responsible for the official decision to purchase things. It was not done by the trustees as a whole; it was done by the acquisitions committee. The director was a member ex officio, but he had the right to vote. That was the only case where I-- They several times tried to make me a trustee, said I should become a trustee. I said, "No. I'm on this side and you're on that side, and let's keep it that way." But I did have a right to vote on the accessions committee. They ranged from people like Severance Millikin, who was a collector himself-- He collected Chinese and Japanese porcelain. He had some nice pictures and bronzes, and his wife [Greta Millikin] was very knowledgeable in art. She was Viennese. They had some very good French furniture, most of which is in



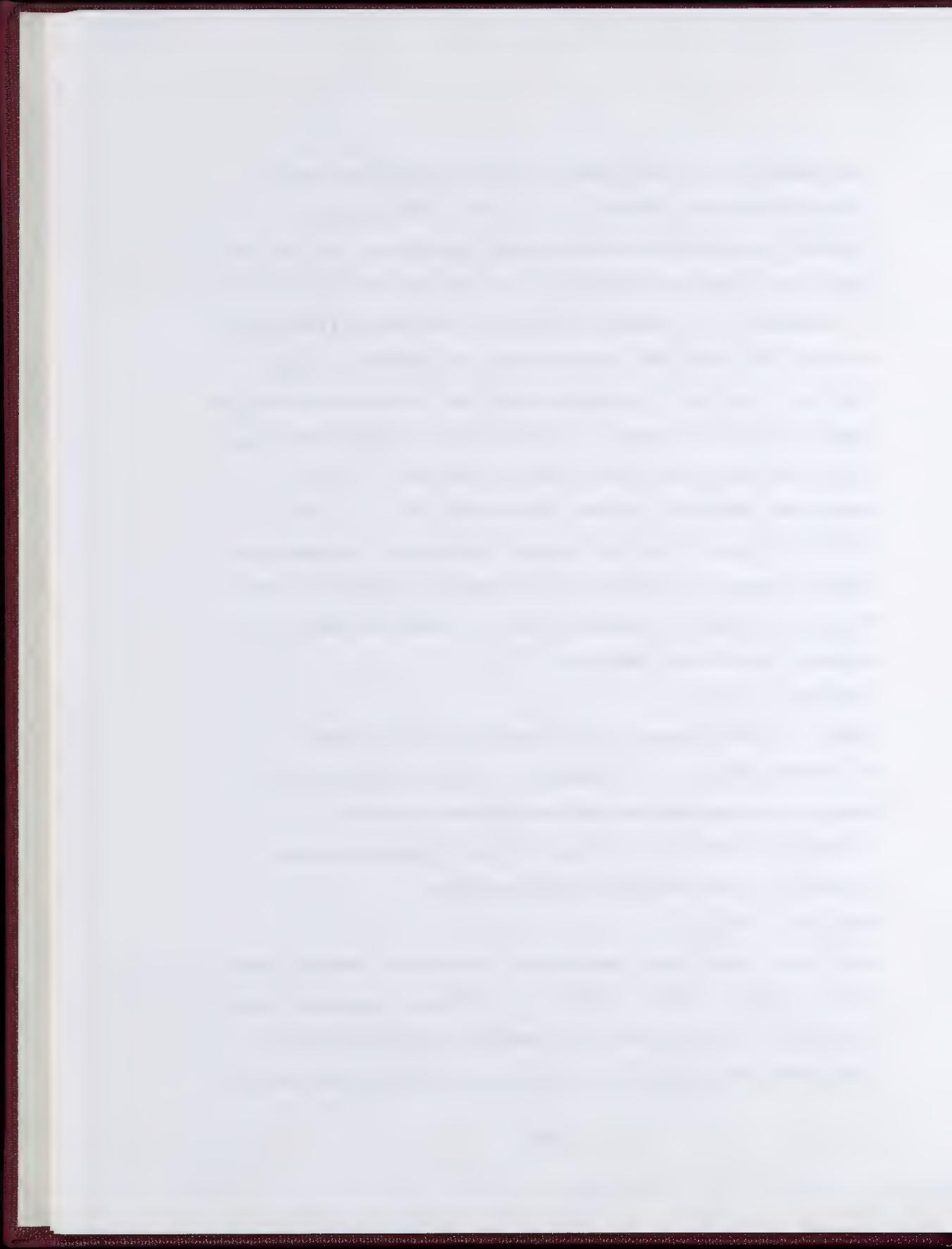
the museum now. There were-- Well, Inge Kilroy, who collects American furniture later on. She became a trustee and went on the accessions committee. In the old days, Lew [Lewis B.] Williams, who was the father of Lewis C. Williams, who became president of the board later on-- Lewis B. Williams was president of the Federal Reserve bank for a while in the Depression and he was president of the National City Bank. He collected prints and drawings and a few paintings. Emery May Norweb was on the committee regularly and was president later on. She collected coins. She had a great collection of American coins, a great collection of English gold coins from the earliest through Elizabethan and on, which she gave to the museum. Let's see, who else?

RUTH LEE: Vignos.

LEE: Oh, Paul Vignos, who collects various things. He collected some not very important modern paintings and some Indian sculptures and some Chinese ceramic sculptures. There was George Bickford, who collected Indian art, who was accessions committee.

RUTH LEE: Perry.

LEE: Oh! Well, [A.] Dean Perry-- His wife, Geenie [Wade] Perry, made a superb collection of Chinese paintings which is coming to the museum as a promised gift. But then there were other people, like John Wilbur, who was an all-



American tackle at Yale [University] in 1934, who was not interested in art. Nice man, but not interested in art.

GARDNER: Why was he there?

LEE: Well, he was a trustee, and the idea was that each trustee should be on one of the committees. When I became director they had only three committees: an executive committee to act when the board was in between board meetings, if necessary; a finance committee--

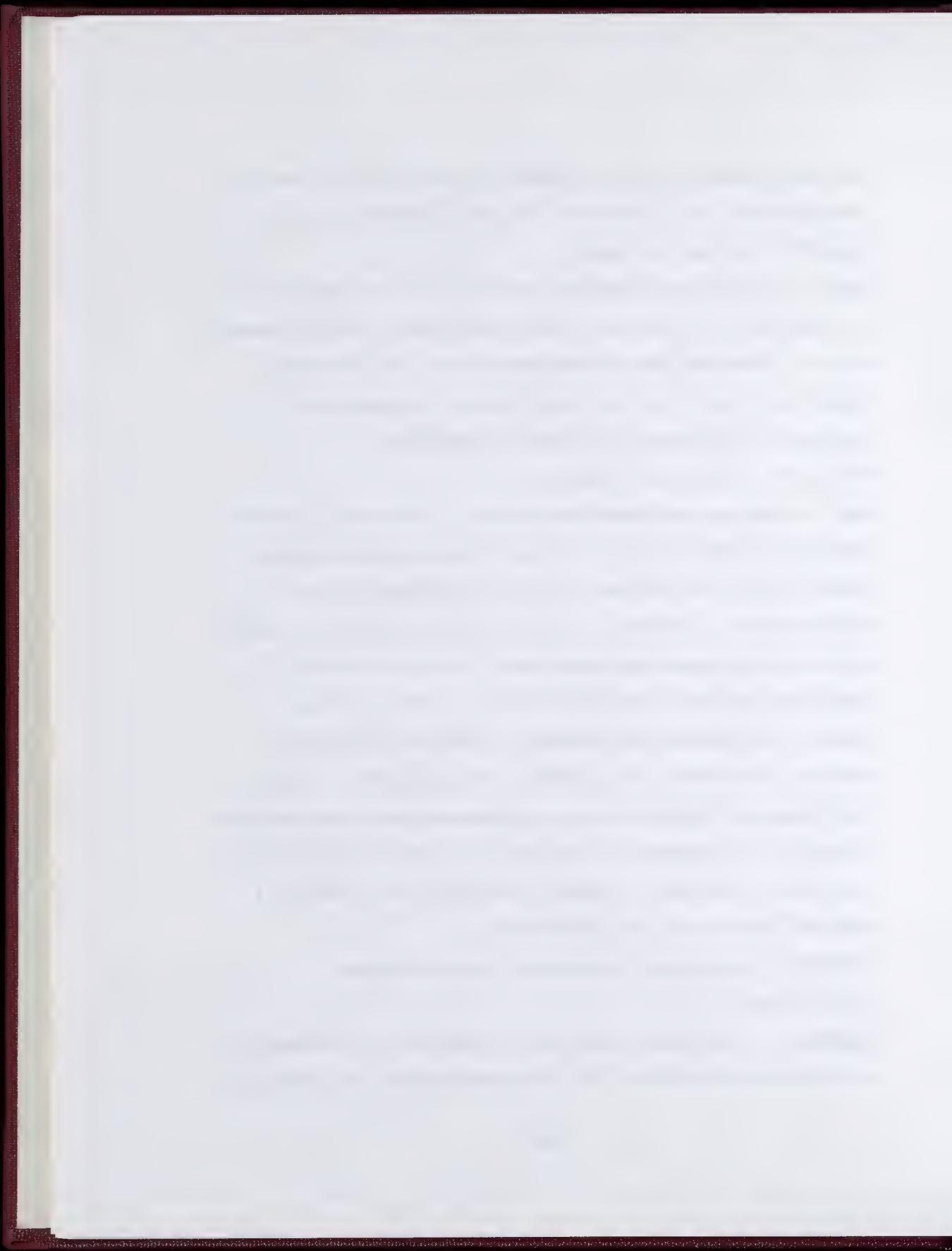
RUTH LEE: Accessions committee.

LEE: An accessions committee, right. Executive, finance, accessions committees. We added an education committee later on and John [Wilbur] was made chairman of that because he was interested in the educational work. They tried to put people on committees. And the finance committee was very tightly held by all the financial people, the bankers and lawyers or the very wealthier people. They did a very good job managing the finances. Jim [James N.] Sherwin was on the accessions committee and a very, very reasonable, nice man, interested very much in the museum, but not a collector really. Jim [James D.] Ireland, who was on the committee--

GARDNER: This sounds like a very big committee.

LEE: Eleven.

GARDNER: In the experience you've had around museums, and particularly later with all the associations and so on you

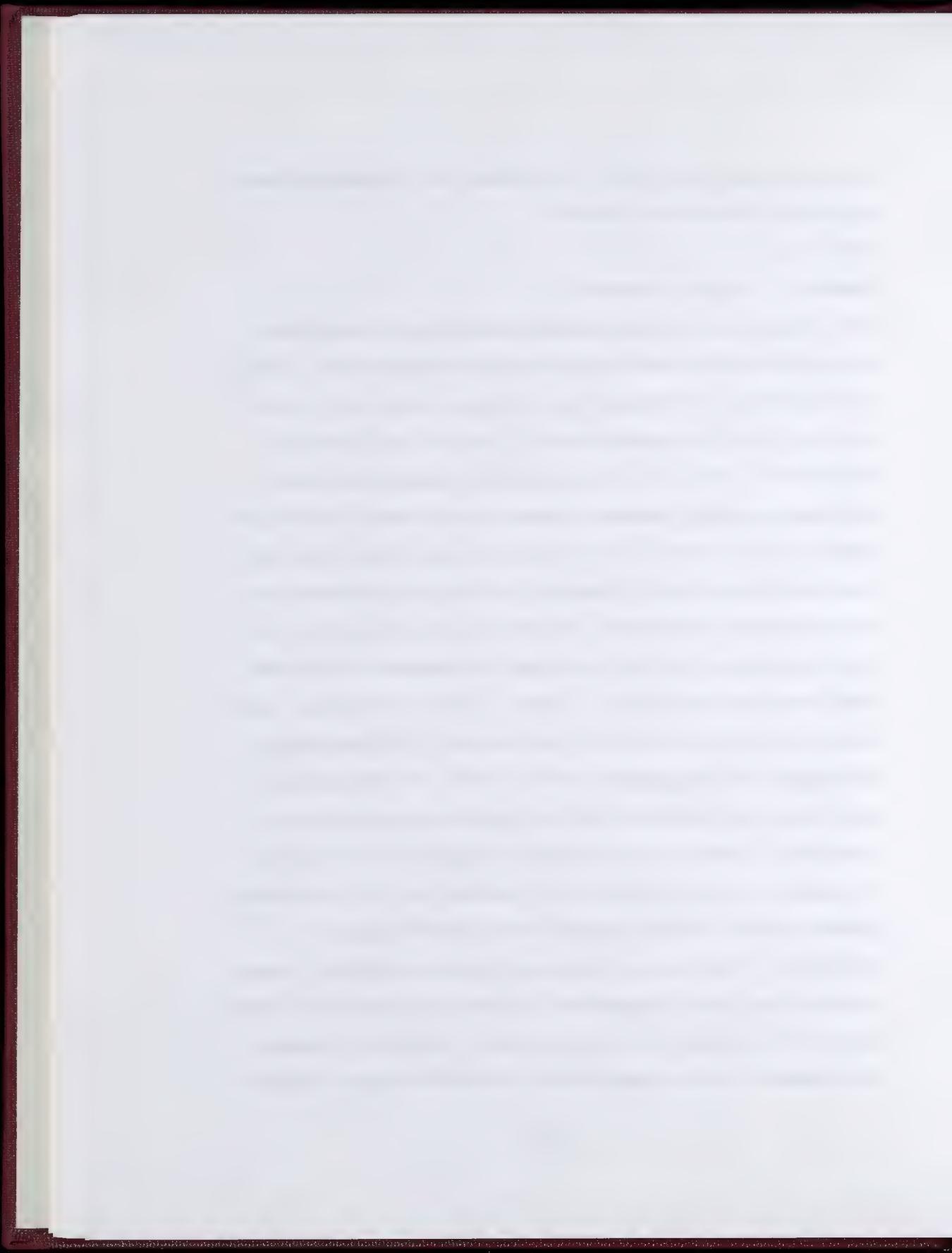


were involved with, isn't this large for an acquisitions committee compared to others?

LEE: No.

GARDNER: Is this standard?

LEE: Many museums have bigger acquisitions committees. The Metropolitan [Museum of Art] has a bigger one. [The Art Institute of] Chicago has a bigger one. And I must say that they also meddle more. They're big, powerful collectors. When you get, you know, people like Avery Brundage or Bobby [Robert] Lehman in New York, you've got power to burn there. And it can be very, very-- One of the nice things about Cleveland is that while there were no powerhouse collectors, the traditional idea from the very beginning, in 1916, was that the museum is the one that does the collecting. I mean, John L. Severance left some wonderful paintings to the museum: The Burning of the Houses of Parliament-- But in terms of collectors-- I mean, when you think of [J. P.] Morgan or you think of [Benjamin] Altman or you think of Douglas Dillon now in Chinese painting or Arthur [M.] Sackler or, oh, you know, Potter Palmer, Russell Tyson-- That didn't happen in Cleveland. That was not the way Cleveland worked. Every now and then some disgruntled trustee would say they were just rubber stamps for the director. But they listened. The curators made presentations of each of their objects



and there was a vote.

Occasionally you'd get a little vibration of resistance. For example, one of the classic occasions was-- One of the first paintings the museum ever bought from Wildenstein [and Company]-- William would never go to Wildenstein's. He didn't like Wildenstein's and he wouldn't go there. But they had a wonderful painting, a crucifixion by Jean de Beaumetz from the charterhouse of Champmol, Dijon, and, I mean, for a French medieval collection, a work of the highest importance. Well, we put it up for the committee, and George Bickford, who was a collector of Indian art and a pillar of the-- Which church was he a pillar of?

RUTH LEE: Our church.

LEE: Your church? You mean the Anglican Church?

RUTH LEE: You pay the bills.

LEE: Yes, I pay the bills. We started to present the painting, and George said, "Oh, not another bleeding Christ!" [laughter] That was one famous remark. The trustees once voted down an object, and they lived to regret it. It was a put-up job. Emery May Norweb thought Sherman was getting a little bit too sure of himself and so he needed to learn a lesson. So they decided they would do that at the accessions committee meeting. Louise [S.] Richards was curator of prints and drawings, and the



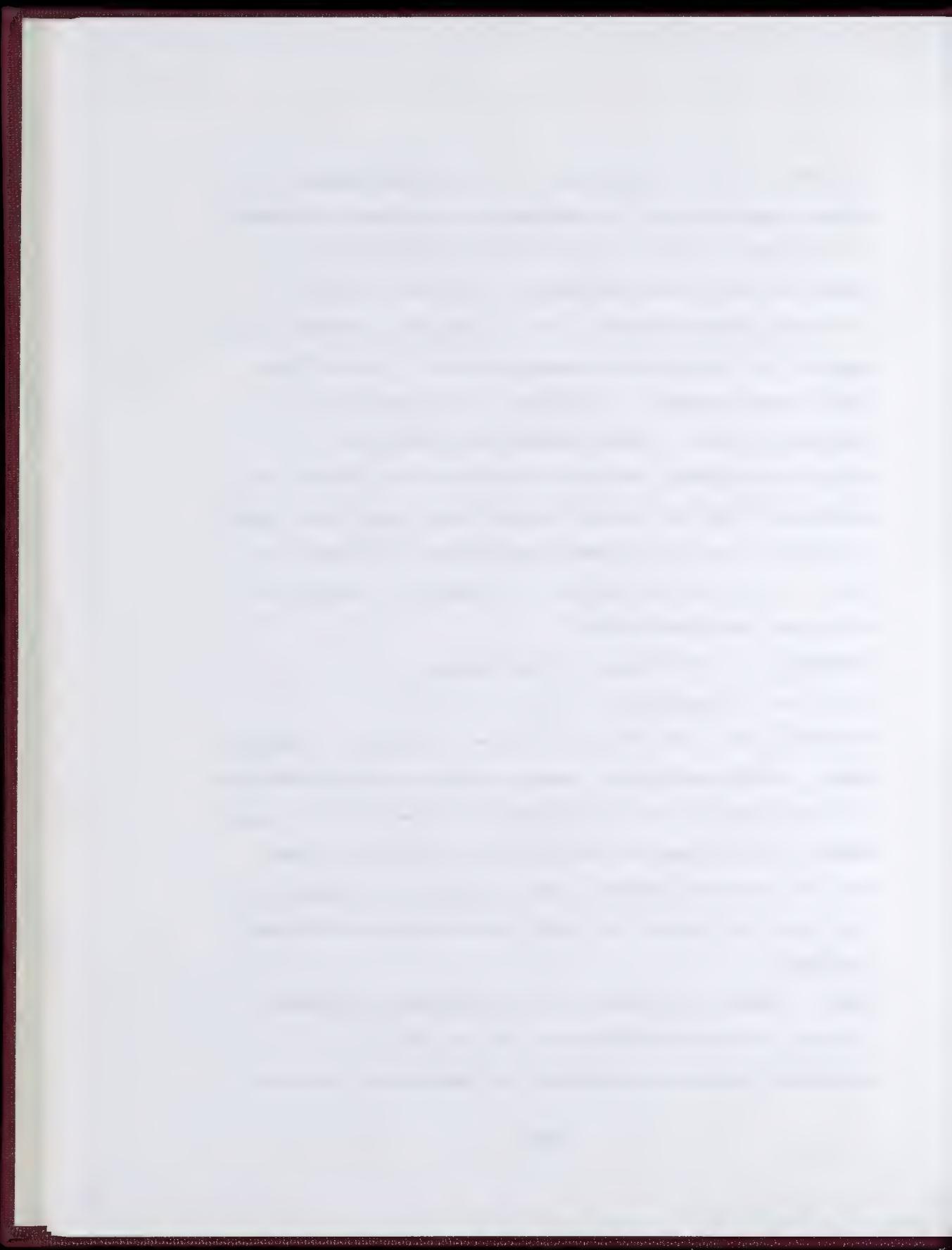
work fell into her department. I think they picked this object because Louise was perhaps the one least equipped to fight back. It was a Samuel Palmer watercolor. A beautiful one. Shoreham period. It's now in the [Pierpont] Morgan Library. It was \$32,000, and they voted against it. Louise was almost in tears. I said, "Okay. That's your decision. It's gone." Each year, at an appropriate time, I would remind them about that particular incident and that particular work of art and I would give them the market value of that piece as of that particular time, until they finally said, "No more. No more. Let's drop the subject." [laughter] That's the only time they ever said no.

GARDNER: Oh, that's quite a good record.

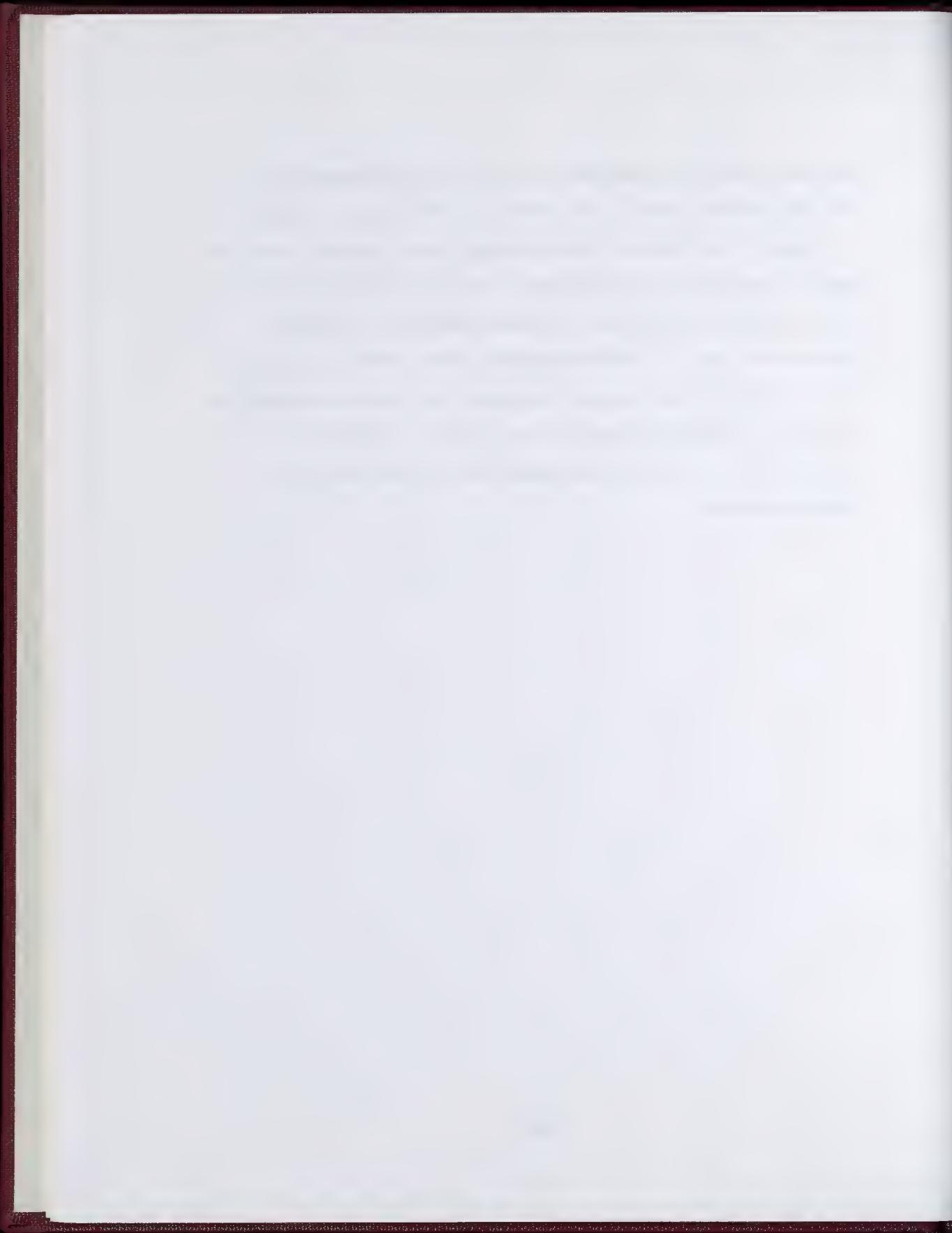
LEE: Yes. [laughter]

GARDNER: Let's see how much time we have left on the tape side. We're running out. Well, let me ask you a question you can answer briefly. Why didn't you want to be a board member? Very often the structure of the board is such that the director becomes a board president or something like that, as opposed to a CEO [chief executive officer] chairman.

LEE: I think, one, there's a real conflict of interest. I think it's the responsibility of the director to represent the professional side of the museum, the staff



and the discipline and the theory. He's supposed to be the top professional in the museum. If he is a trustee, he enters into another relationship, which is one where he has a fiduciary responsibility. He can't feel as free, I think. Some people think it makes him free. I don't think so at all. I think there's a real conflict there. And I think I tried to get across to the last president of the board, who was a good friend of mine, Jim [James H.] Dempsey [Jr.], who was president when I retired, the concept of this.

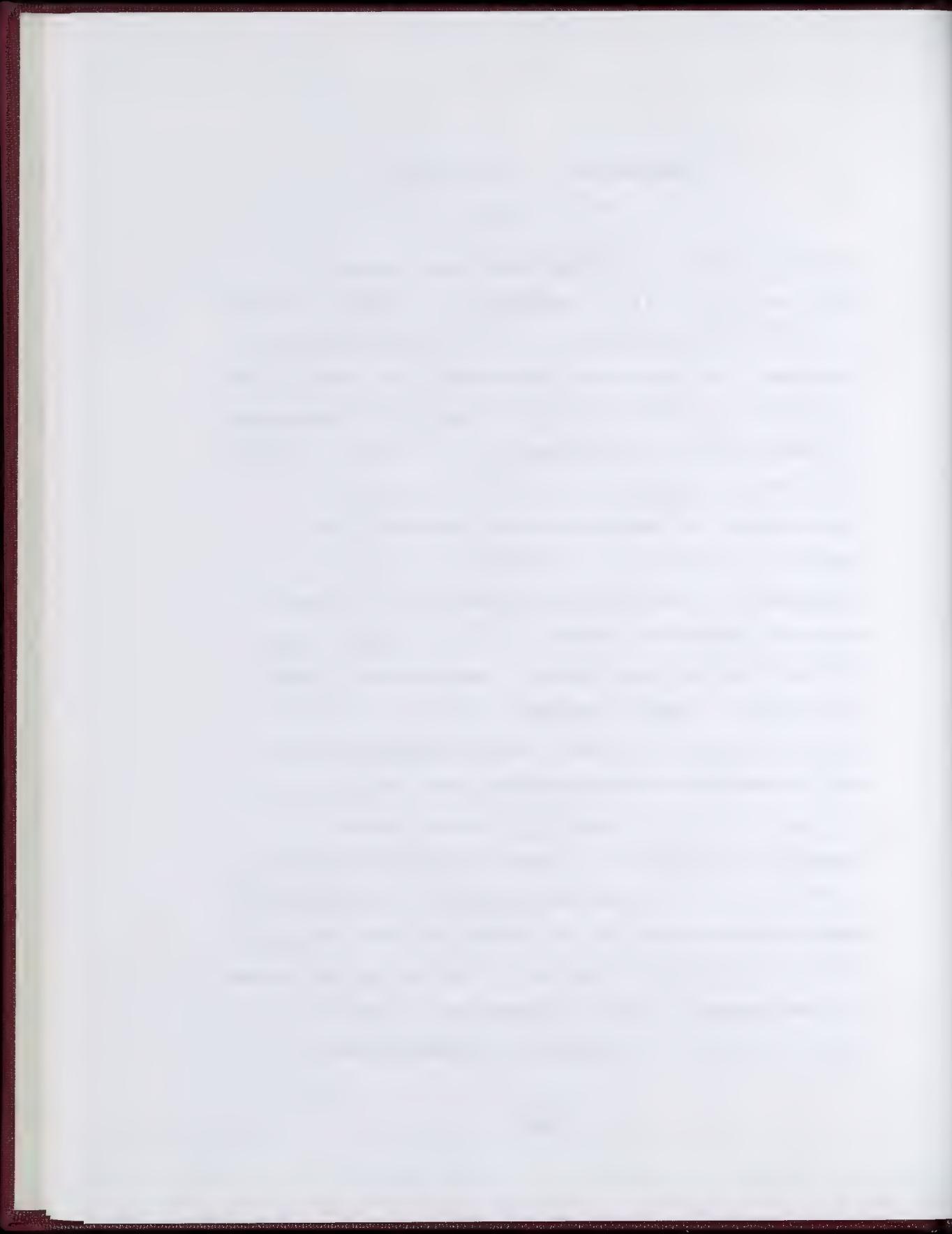


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JULY 13, 1992

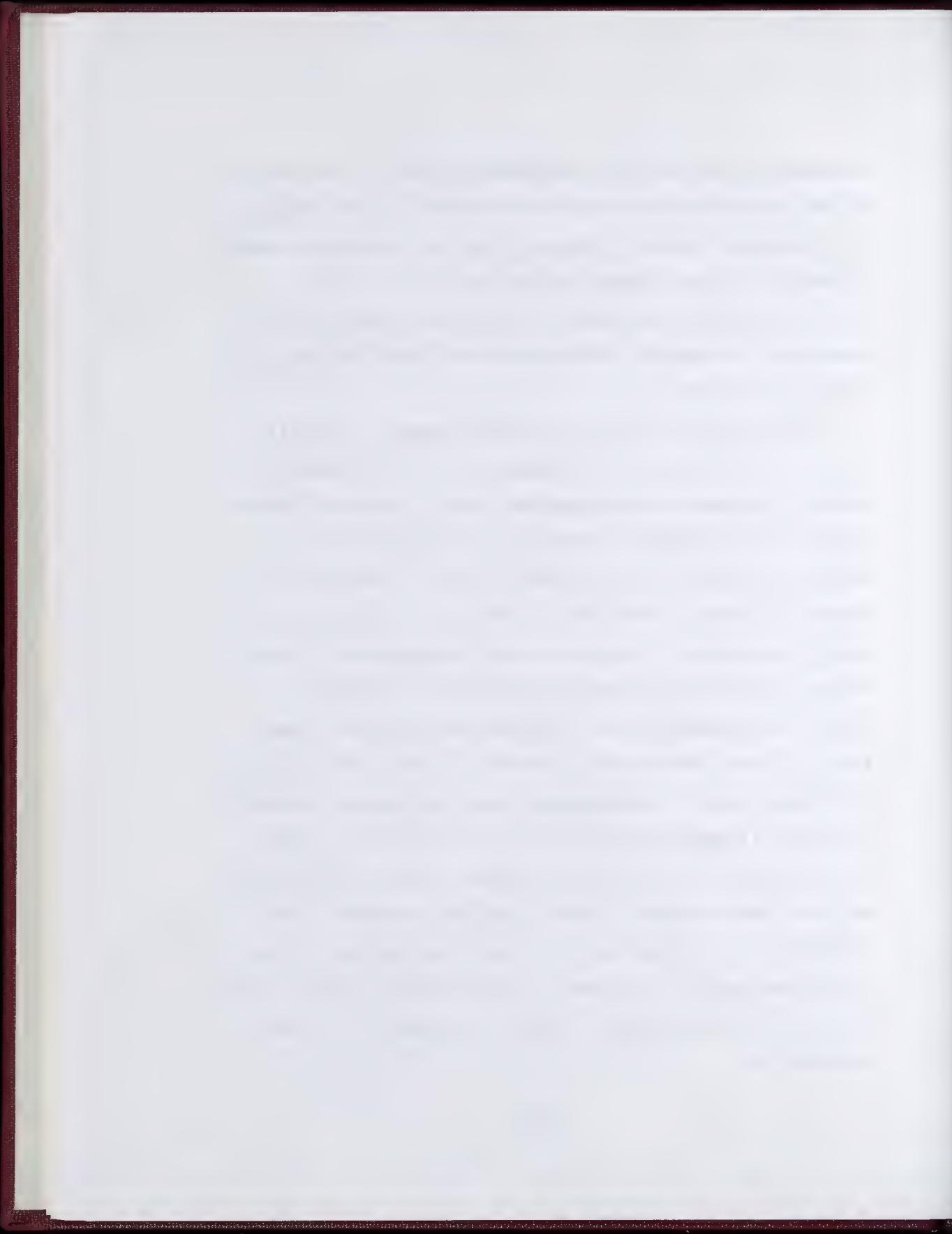
GARDNER: Begin with the symbiotic relationships.

LEE: Yes, I think it's a symbiotic relationship between art and the representatives of art, the professionals in the museum, and, let's say, businessmen, including lawyers or bankers. I think it's very difficult for a businessman to understand that the business of an art museum is not to make money but spend it and lose it, but do it as intelligently, as rationally and as carefully, as possible. I think it's very difficult for them to understand that they can't cut corners when it comes to matters of quality or authenticity or condition: "What will work and work well enough is good enough." That's not the way it works in the realm of art. I think the best relationships are where each side understands what their responsibilities are and what their relationship is and they don't try to think of it as one kind of homogeneous soup that's all based upon the most powerful element, which is the business element. This concept of a symbiotic relationship is not looked upon with very great favor on the business side, and I think one of the things that has happened in the art museum world, especially today, is that this relationship has become rather



confused at best and has disappeared at worst. We see it in the activities of the present director of the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim Museum. We see it in the increasing number of people running museums who are basically--or in considerable part--business school or business training graduates. We see it in the priorities that are set up in many museums today.

With my friends who are sporting types, my tennis partners or the trustees or people who are interested in sports, I tried to always explain this in terms of sports, because that's something Americans can understand. I mean, first of all, in the realm of sport, the idea of quality is simply taken for granted, and not only is it taken for granted, it's objectively discernible. I mean, Michael Jordon is one considerably better basketball player than somebody else. The man who hit sixty home runs-- I mean, Babe Ruth is clearly a giant. You get into the tennis world: Andre Agassi gives me a royal pain in the butt, [laughter] but he's a hell of a tennis player, just as some works of art give people a pain or a curator may give people a pain. That's not the question. The question is, what does he do or what does the work of art do for the museum? And you can explain this in the realm of sport, where they don't have a clue about it in the realm of art.



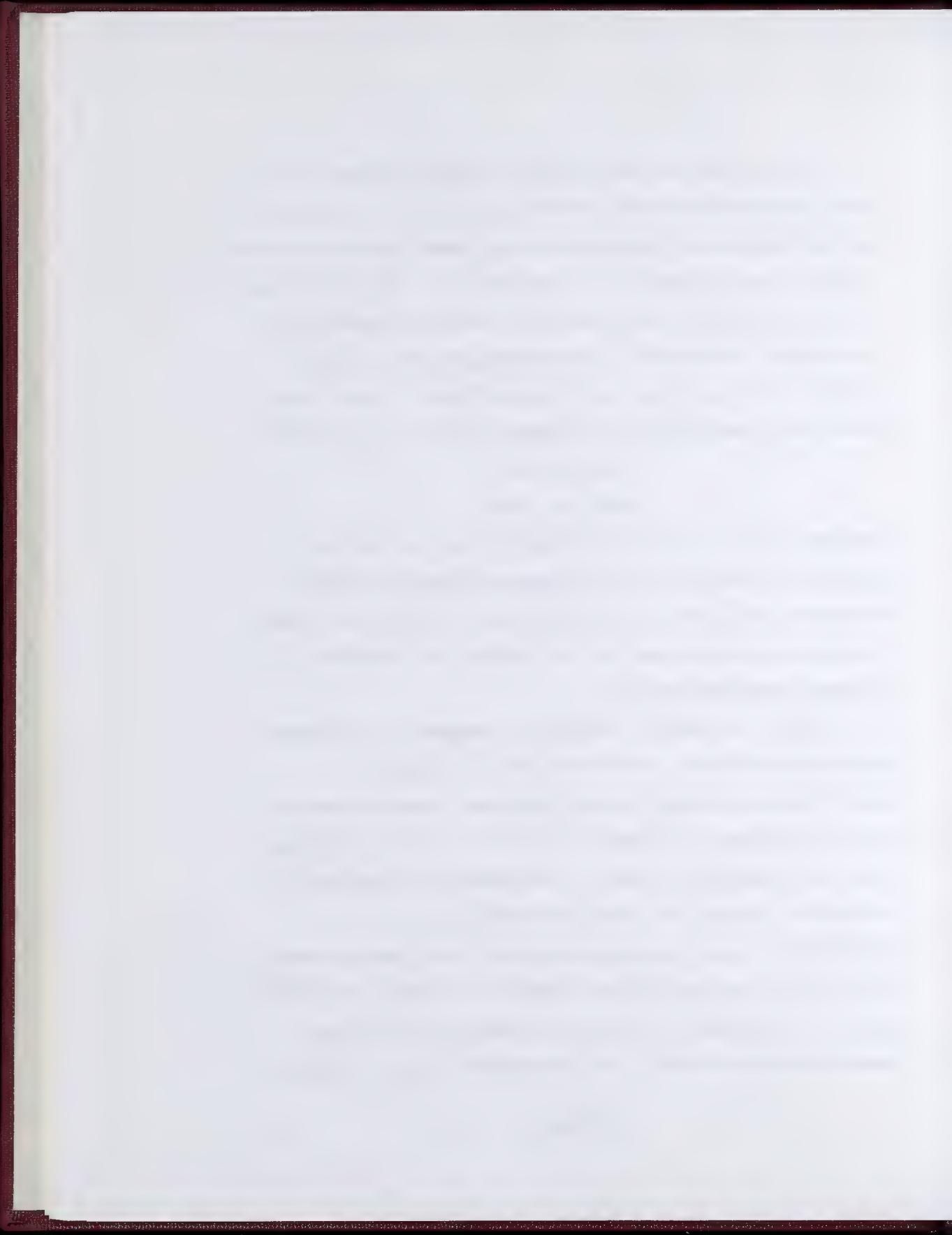
And now that you've got all of these professorial types interested in deconstruction and in the sociological and anthropological approach to art, where the destruction of the concept of quality is commonplace, they're helping this destruction of the symbiotic--essential symbiotic--relationship themselves. They're digging their own graves, which is a very sad thing to watch. That's one reason why I don't think a director should be a trustee.

SECOND PART

JULY 14, 1992

GARDNER: To start with, I'd like to ask you to talk a little bit about the exhibit Japanese Decorative Style, which was really the first major show of your new regime. You had said you wanted to tie it into the 1953 show Chinese Landscape Painting.

LEE: Well, the special exhibition program at the museum had basically been, before World War II, either exhibitions organized jointly with the Museum of Modern Art-- The Museum of Modern Art actually did the catalog. They were basically funded by the Hanna Fund because of Leonard's interest in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European painting. They were splendid exhibitions that were shown first in New York, then they came to Cleveland. They were pioneering exhibitions in educating people about late nineteenth-, early twentieth-



century painting, principally French.

When I'd been a graduate student here in '39 or '41, Howard [C.] Hollis had arranged--and I assisted him--an exhibition of Chinese ceramics, basically ceramics of the T'ang and Sung dynasties with a few later and a few earlier things involved. It was a large and major exhibition. It was educational, certainly for me, and I think it was educational for a lot of people. There hadn't been that many Chinese ceramics exhibitions. Still, by and large, the American museum world, except for the Museum of Modern Art and the occasional exhibition at Boston or the Metropolitan, had worked on exhibitions that were basically masterpiece exhibitions. They were aimed at the general public, and there is nothing wrong with that. But there had not been so many exhibitions of the kind that had selected a period of time or a country or an idea and had developed an exhibition that made what could be called a contribution to knowledge.

People began to get serious about exhibitions, I think, after World War II in the United States. There were beginning to be some very good exhibitions, and we all agreed--that means staff--that if we were going to make the effort to spend money and the time and the energy and professional staff and all that entailed, there should be an exhibition that tried to make a contribution:



something new and something different. That was one of the reasons that I'd done the exhibition Chinese Landscape Painting back in 1953. Because, oddly enough, there were a couple of smallish books on Chinese landscape painting written back in the twenties by a German art historian, [Otto] Fischer, but there hadn't been any exhibition of Chinese landscape painting, which, after all, was one of the great contributions of China to the history of world art. So we had that exhibition in '54 and it was done on a shoestring and it made a mark. Not only that, but the catalog became a paperback book--Dover [Press] publications--and it was used by a lot of students and interested people.

So with the new resources available in the beginning of '58-- I had always been interested in what I call the two faces of the Japanese coin: the reverse and the obverse. On the one side you have this absolutely fantastic Japanese ability to produce works of decorative quality in a very positive sense, not merely decorative, but in a very creative way, very daring compositions-- asymmetrical and cut-off figures, the kind of things that influenced Degas and the impressionists in the late nineteenth century. That I called "Japanese decorative style." The other side of the coin, of course, was this Japanese realism, for want of a better word. That was so



extraordinary in the narrative handscrolls, for example, and Japanese portraiture and in the world of the Japanese print, the floating world, ukiyoe, with its interest in everyday life, genre, the prostitutes, and the pleasure quarters and all that. So I wanted to do Japanese Decorative Style, and I had in the back of my head that that would be followed, at some distant time, by an exhibition of the other side of the coin.

We were able to get very good loans from Japan, from private collectors, though not too much from museums. In 1961, major museums that had clout like the National Gallery [of Art] or the Louvre or some of the Italian museums within the field of Italian art were getting loans from churches and from big museums, etc. Japanese Decorative Style basically borrowed from collectors and from collections in the United States. So there were not so many of the high-powered temple possessions or museum possessions, a few, but not the kind of things that came later. But it was a very impressive exhibition visually, and the catalog, again, I think made a contribution. It too was taken over by Dover and was made into a paperback and was used a great deal in schools and for general reading.

We tried in our exhibition program to do exhibitions that had not been done before and do ones that would make



a genuine contribution. I have just a list of some of them here. For instance, Remy Saisselin was a very bright, brilliant French scholar, but an American citizen, who was very much interested in the eighteenth century and the age of rationalism and so forth. He developed a theme called Style, Truth, and the Portrait, which was an exhibition of principally French portraiture which he organized. Again, nobody had seen anything like that one. Then Henry Hawley did Neoclassicism: Style and Motif, which was one of the first exhibitions that picked up the interest in neoclassic art which was just developing at that time. Of course, later on, at the Burlington house in London, they had a huge neoclassic exhibition with some six or seven hundred pieces. But the Hawley exhibition was one of the first, and it made a real contribution.

GARDNER: How many pieces would be in an exhibit of yours?

LEE: Normally not less than 80 or 85. In a few circumstances more, but basically not more than about 120, 130.

When we had our fiftieth anniversary, we had a celebratory exhibition because of our strong medieval collection, which was Bill [William D.] Wixom's idea: Treasures from Medieval France, which was a spectacular show. We got great cooperation from the French. Hubert Landais, who was to become director of all the museums in



France, had worked in Cleveland on a fellowship for six or eight months. He helped us and the director of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Marcel Thomas, and others. Bill Wixom and I went all over France looking for material, unusual and important Romanesque material, Gothic material. It was a marvelous show.

Ed Henning did his Fifty Years of Modern Art, and then the following year Wai-Kam Ho and I organized the exhibition Chinese Art under the Mongols: The Art of the Yüan Dynasty, 1279-1368. That was a period that had been basically overlooked. It was between two famous periods, Sung and Ming. It had been a dumping ground for things that they didn't want to put in Sung or Ming. We worked very hard on it and were able to borrow significant material from Japan. It wasn't possible at that time to borrow anything from the PRC [People's Republic of China], and Taiwan at that time had a policy of not lending to individual exhibitions. But we got all the material from Japanese collections and from European and American collections. It really was the first exhibition, the first time and in print really, that there was an effort to define what the positive contributions of the Yüan dynasty had been. We had a symposium and a lot of scholars came from all over. It was a very, very big success.



Where we didn't have expertise on the staff and we felt that an exhibition should be done, we got it from outside. In '71, we asked Richard [E.] Spear, professor at Oberlin [College], who was the leading expert in the world on Domenichino. He had developed a tremendous interest in Caravaggio. We had gotten to know, a little bit, Denis Mahon, the English scholar who almost owned the subject in Europe. We had the exhibition Caravaggio and His Followers in '71. That, again, was a contribution. Gabe [Gabriel P.] Weisberg, who became curator of education in the early seventies, did an exhibition, one of the first exhibitions that went into that subject, Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art. We acquired a Johann Liss painting--a rare German master and a very beautiful painter--one of the few paintings by him in America. Annie [Ann T.] Lurie, our curator of paintings, wanted to do an exhibition on Johann Liss. We did that in '75, '76 [Johann Liss], the first exhibition ever held of his work, and done jointly with Augsburg, his hometown. Then we came to the 1976 celebration of the bicentennial. Wai-kam Ho had suggested that while everybody was doing something about Americans and thinking about Americans, and Americans taking things from Europe and so forth and so on, why didn't we have an exhibition that looked at America through European eyes? That was the germ of the



idea that led to The European Vision of America, which we did. We organized the exhibition. We got Hugh Honour from Italy to be the guest curator, and it was the major art exhibition for the bicentennial. It was the one that was reviewed everywhere. It was shown in Washington. They insisted on having it first, which was okay with us. They had it open there first, then we had it in Cleveland, and then it went to the Louvre and was shown at the Grand Palais and was very successful everywhere. It was, again, a major contribution.

We were able to get the venue in America for the Chardin exhibition because of our friendship with Hubert Landais. It was very interesting. The Metropolitan had been trying to get it and one of the French curators had been tinkering with not sending it to Cleveland. We were very unhappy. Landais was appointed to be director of all the museums of France--he'd been deputy director--and one of the first things he did was to send a telegram to me saying, "Chardin à Cleveland," which was very, very good news indeed. That was very successful.

Then we were approached by the Links chapter in Cleveland, which is an organization of college-educated black women. They have very, very strong chapters in various cities and a very strong one in Cleveland. They had come to us with a desire to have an exhibition that



would be something of importance for the black community. They had thought of a showing of black artists. Those shows had been done again, again, and again in various places in the country, and we thought--we convinced them--that it would be important to have an exhibition that showed what the black contribution was to American art in terms of historical American art. We hired a guest curator, Dr. [John Michael] Vlach from the University of Indiana, and the exhibition The Afro-American Tradition in the Decorative Arts was the result. That, too, made an original contribution and one which Vlach is still writing about.

One of the most successful exhibitions we ever had, in terms of attendance, was the Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting exhibition, which developed in a perhaps petty but rather interesting way. Larry [Laurence] Sickman was the director at Kansas City [Nelson Gallery of Art--Atkins Museum of Fine Art] and the great expert on Chinese painting in America. He had built the Chinese painting collection in Kansas City in the thirties and forties early on. We were talking, and Larry said, "You know, Wen Fong is trying to get together an exhibition in a big hurry at the Metropolitan. We don't want to let him get away with that, do we?" And I said, "Certainly not." He said, "Why don't we have an exhibition of our stuff?



We'll show it together." I said, "That's a terrific idea. Not only is it a terrific idea, but we can do a catalog which will act as a catalog for each institution, so that we'll have a catalog of Chinese paintings as the by-product of the display." And we developed the Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting show. It was a tremendous success.

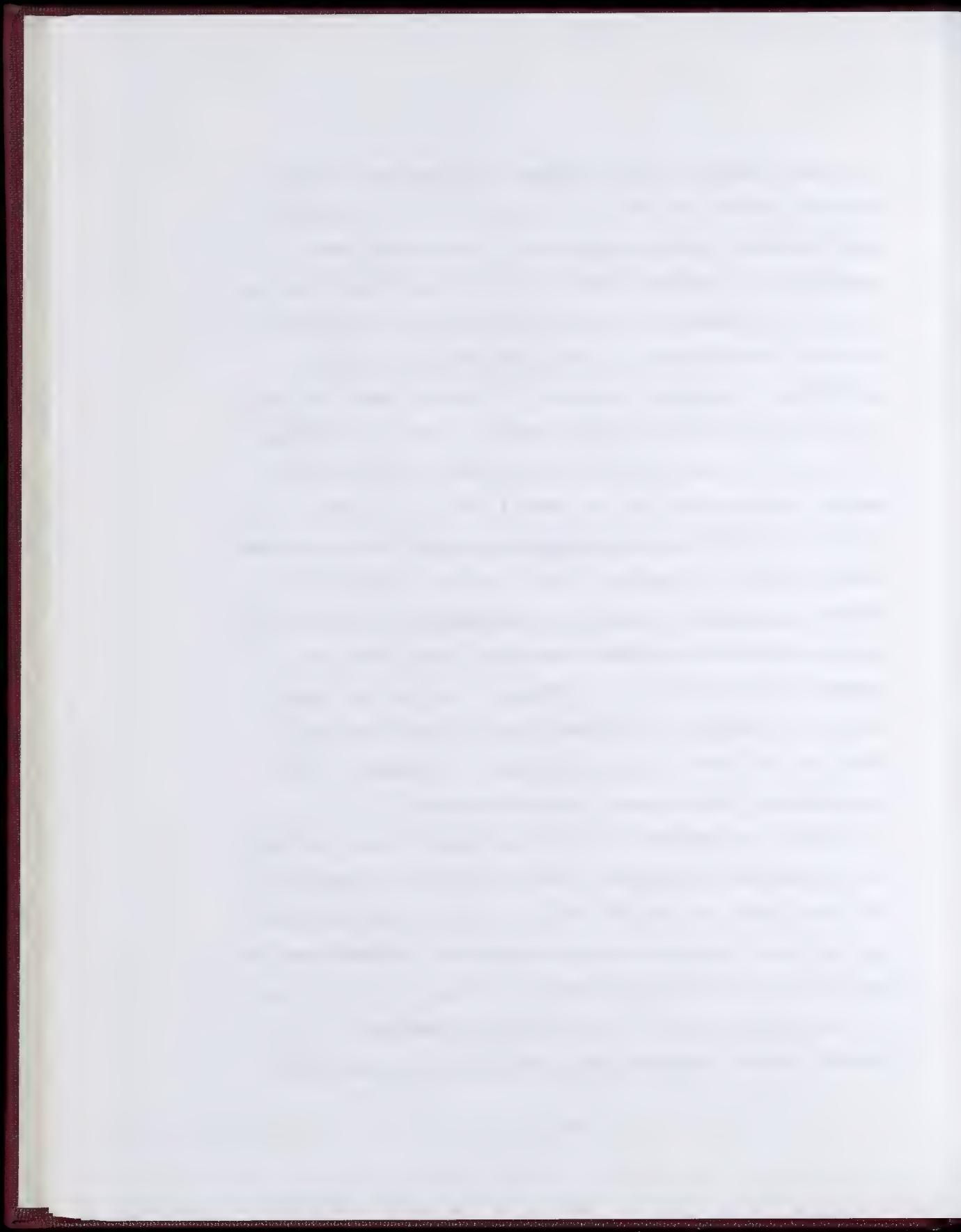
I have to say, I think maybe there was a degree of misunderstanding that caused the success, because all the paintings were from the collections of Cleveland Museum of Art or the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City. We had a lot of paintings. We didn't show every single one, but I think there were over 320 paintings in the exhibition. People came in droves and I could hear them talking. I'm not one hundred percent sure that they understood that all the paintings belonged to Kansas City and Cleveland. I think some of them thought that these had come from China and from Taiwan and so on, because it had the largest attendance of any exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art--I think also at Kansas City--up until that time. It was extraordinary.

Then Gabe Weisberg did an exhibition The Realist Tradition in French Painting, the first time that an exhibition had been devoted to the tradition of the conservative academic and realist painters in the



nineteenth century: artists like Ribot and Bonvin and Lhermitte and Millet and so forth and so on. Gabe was a great believer in proletarian art. He had done the Japonisme show and did a very fine catalog. This also was a very fine catalog and made a contribution. And then in '84--we'd been planning it for some years--we did an exhibition of Bernardo Cavallino, a one-man show like the Liss exhibition, with a guest curator. Ann Lurie did most of the work on that. Then, finally, my last exhibition before I retired was the one that I had been thinking about even before Japanese Decorative Style, which was the other side of the Japanese coin. And that exhibition we called Reflections of Reality in Japanese Art. That was a really major show with very important loans which the Japanese really bent over backwards to do the very best they could, because they knew it was my swan song, as it were. We got some fantastic material from Japan, just unbelievable, plus material from the States.

Now, I recite this thing to emphasize the point that our program was developed-- There were other exhibitions, but meant to be educational for a limited, local audience. But the major shows that we put the money into and that we spent the time to produce a major catalog for, etc., were all designed to make a contribution to knowledge. Our feeling--which the staff all agreed on, and we believed it



thoroughly--was that it wasn't fair to risk works of art to travel and exposure and etc. unless you were doing something that was not just, you know, a masterpiece exhibition or-- It should be something that was new, different, and made a contribution.

GARDNER: Well, yesterday we talked about the acquisitions committee and their role in selecting works and approving purchases. Was there any similar role for the board on exhibitions, or did you and your staff have carte blanche?

LEE: There was no exhibitions committee. There were informal conversations, but basically the exhibition program would begin to be seen by the board in its appearance in the preliminary studies and in the annual budget. That would occur anywhere from three to four years before the exhibition actually occurred, and that would be the first occasion at which the board would know about the plans for such an exhibition. In approving the budget, they approved the exhibition plan. The trustees and the administration looked upon the budget as the key annual review of the state of the museum and of its future planning. Fortunately we simply did not have this plethora of committees where the trustees were playing at being museum professionals, as happens in only too many museums. I think they have more committees now than they used to because of financial demands and particularly



development programs. Of course, when we were in the construction phase, as we were in '56 to '58 and '69 to '71 and when the library gallery wing was being done in '82 to '83, there was a building committee that was specifically charged--trustees--with riding herd and keeping track of what was going on in the building for very obvious important reasons of financial control.

The museum world has changed so radically. One can mark the beginning of that change--in a symbolic and, to a certain extent, in an actual way---with the appearance of Thomas P. F. Hoving on the scene when he became the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He opened it in a big way with an exhibition Harlem on My Mind. A great many of us in the museum world--I would say a majority of the major museum directors--were very, very critical of Hoving's methods and of his program.

GARDNER: Could you be more specific about what his program was and why you were critical?

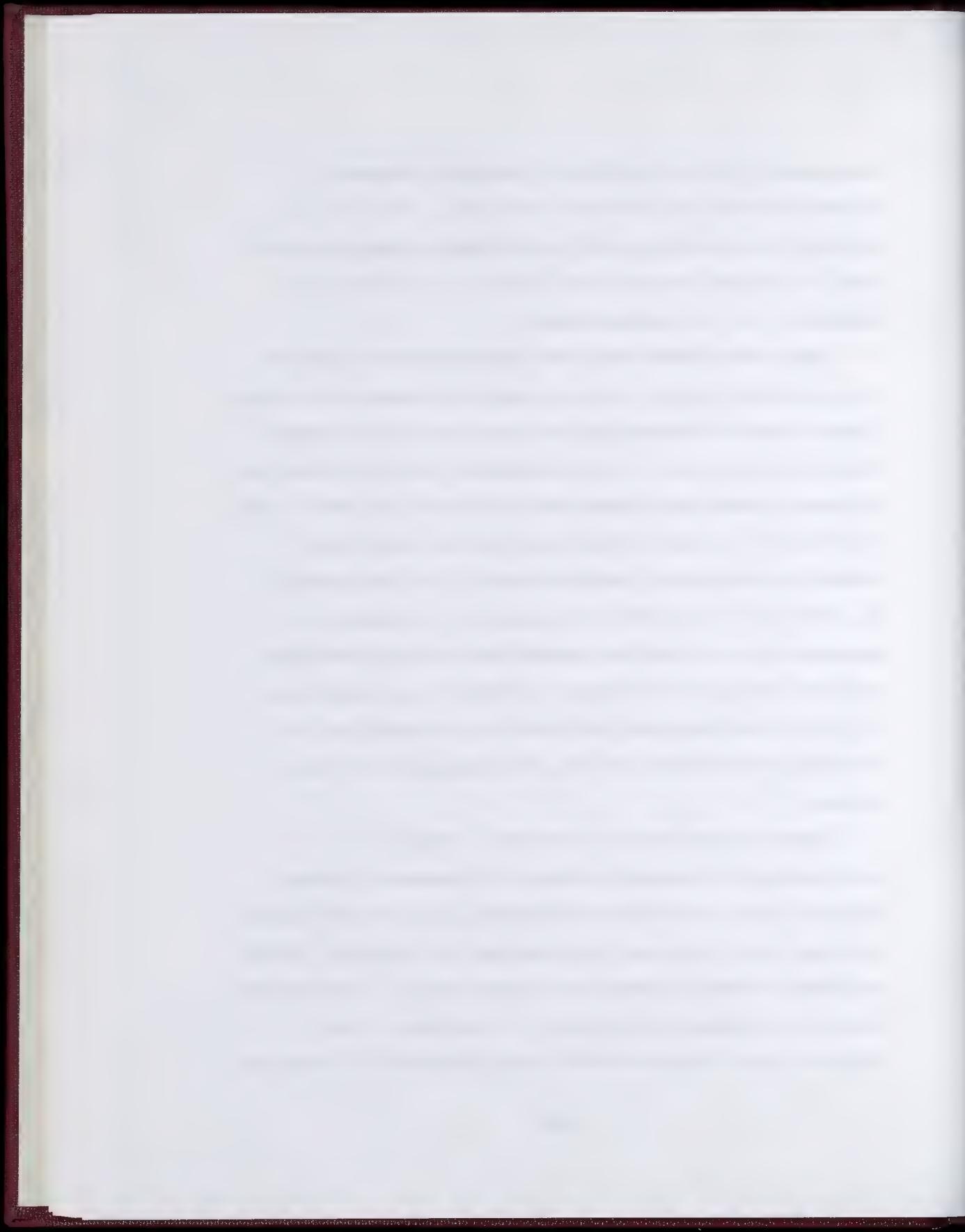
LEE: Well, the idea basically I think, as he himself said, was to broaden the goals of the museum to include within its purview social responsibility, social activism in terms of minority groups and in terms of even political questions. It was picked up of course in modern museums by museums like the Whitney. Their activities with the contemporary artist, in many cases, involved real estate



development in New York City or activist programs in connection with the political left wing. This was in addition to continuing work in the realm of art and what, back in the dim, distant past, used to be called "art education" or "art appreciation."

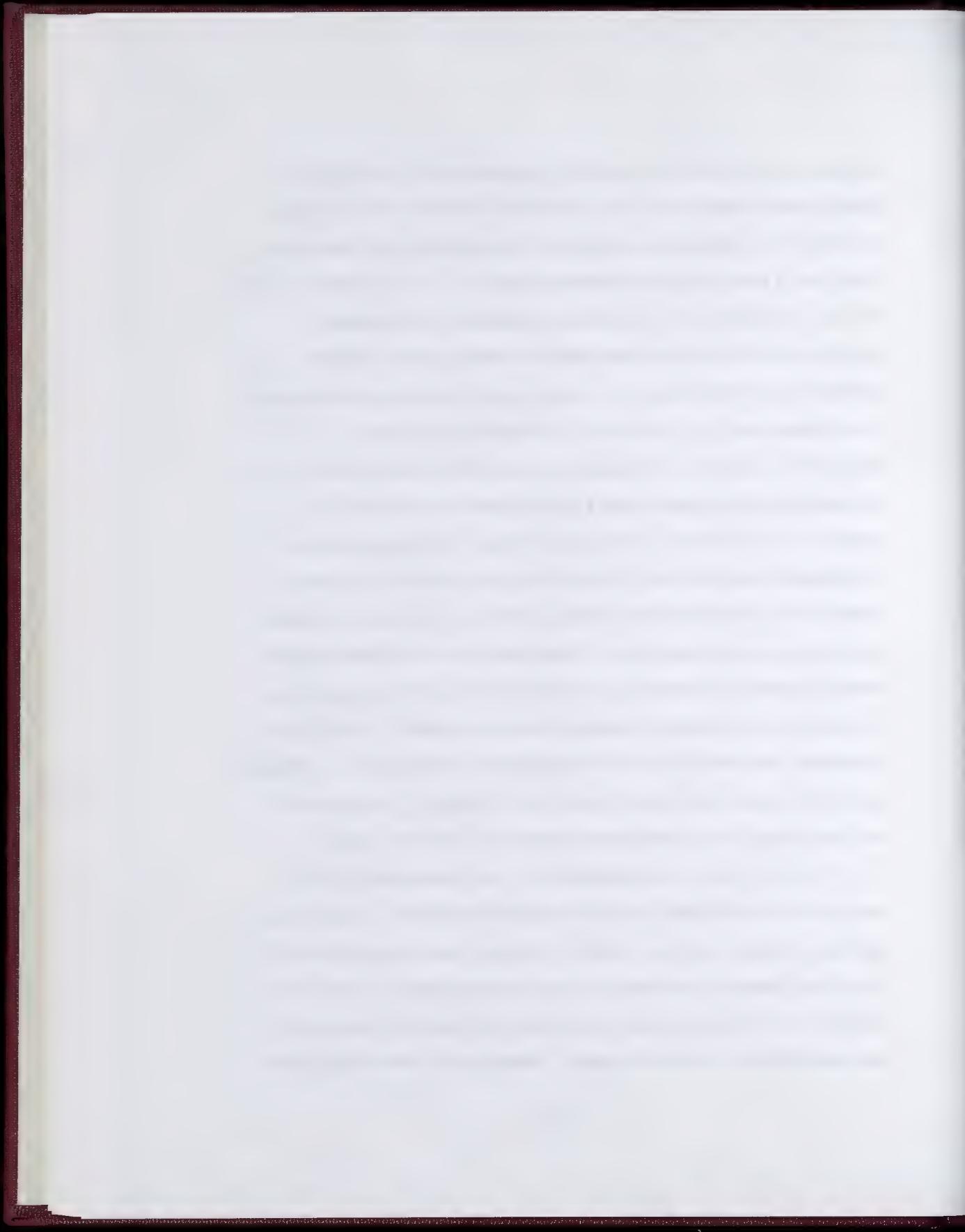
There were areas where the museum became a part of the political, social, and economic environment in a given locale where attendance figures were terribly important, where money was spent on a considerable scale in order to increase attendance figures and to attract the public into the museum. Certainly there was nothing wrong with attracting the public into the museum, but the question is, when is it that they are coming to the museum for purposes that involve the understanding of art and when are they coming to the museum in order to be entertained or to be given programs that have only an ancillary or secondary relationship to the principal goals of the art museum?

There are all kinds of museums. There are anthropological museums or historical museums, science museums, there are industrial museums, specialized museums involved with let's say the steamboat or railroad. There are snake farms and everything under the sun. But the art museum is a unique institution. In America, in my opinion, and I think it's not merely opinion-- I think any



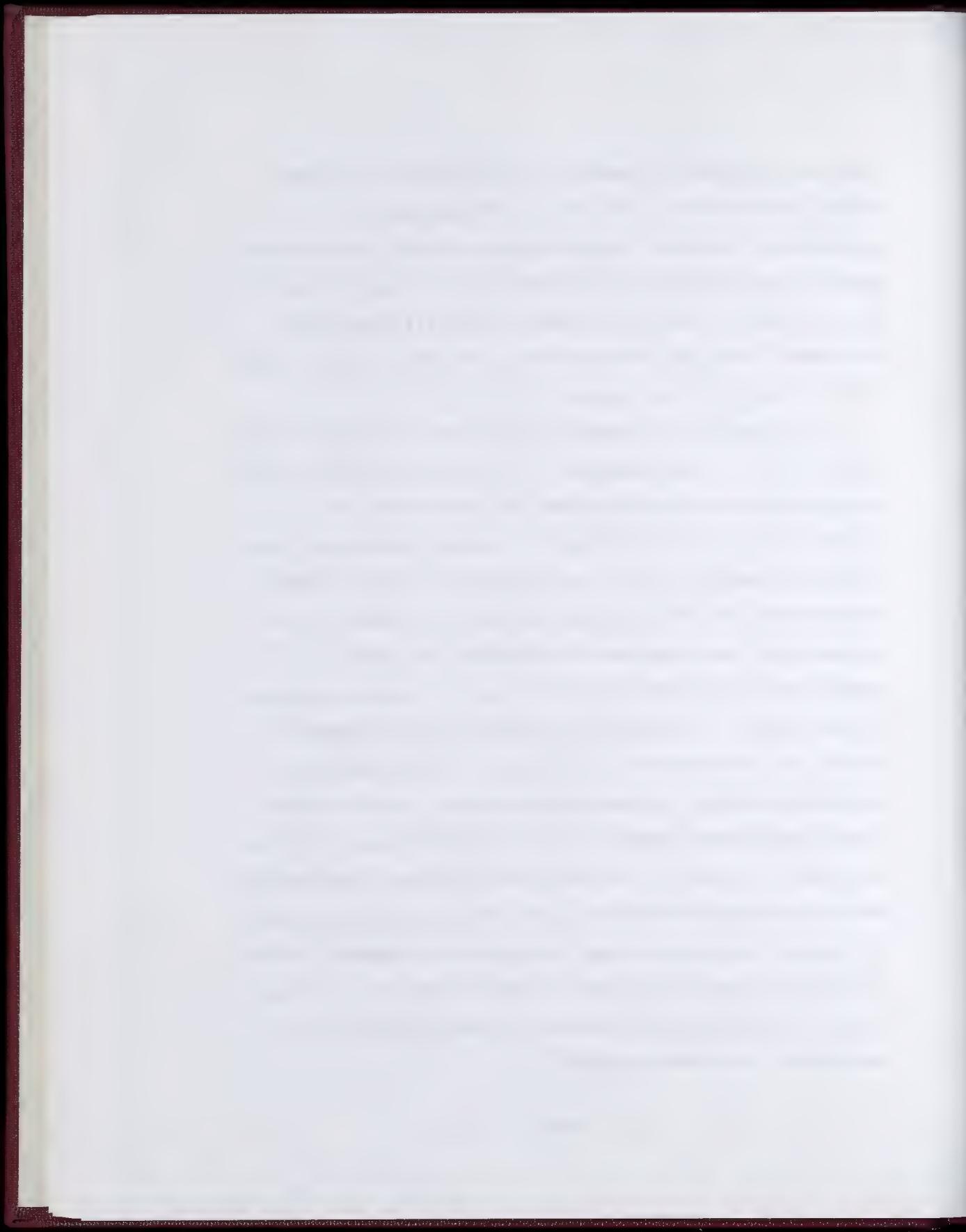
objective historian or social historian of the United States would say that the twentieth century has not seen the kind of comparable increase in interest in the arts that one finds in other things--sports, entertainment, and so on. Actually, E. P. [Edgar Preston] Richardson, director at Detroit [Institute of Arts] and a great authority on American art, took great delight in showing that there was, in terms of a proportion of the population, greater interest in the 1840s and 1850s in art in America than there was in the 1940s and 1950s, a hundred years later. The idea, then, of the so-called blockbuster exhibition, which was not always--in some cases was--an exhibition that needed to be done in terms of making a contribution-- There would be collections of masterpieces or something that were one of the topics of the moment in terms of news or entertainment. Well, you remember how many van Gogh exhibitions there were. There must have been one every year for a while. They didn't add anything, but everybody wanted to see van Gogh.

This in turn led--because of the increase in the entertainment aspect of the museum--to balls, receptions, special events, and so forth. People don't understand that that means the staff of the museum has to work that much harder to do things that are not part of the major responsibility of the museum. That means that they have



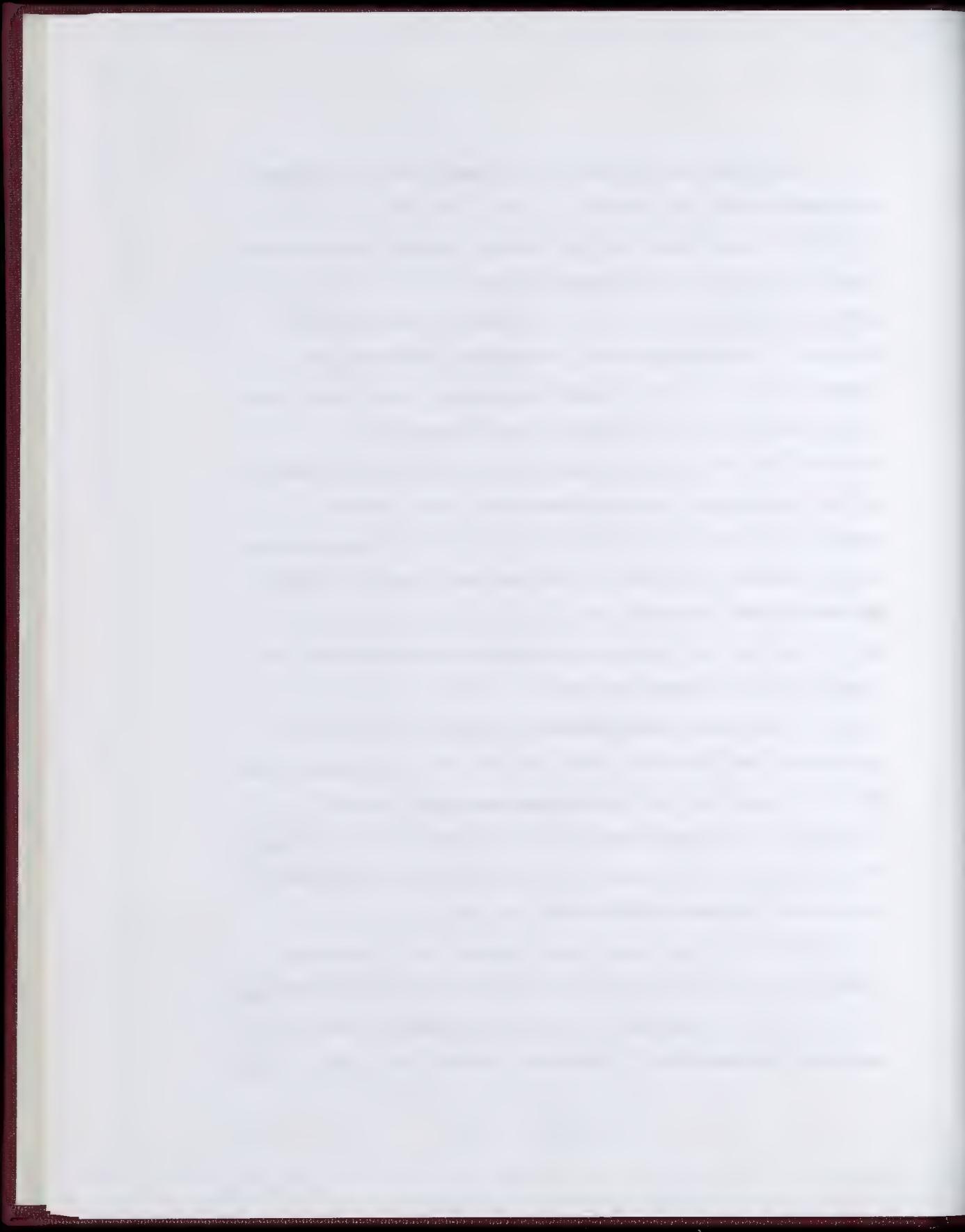
less time to spend on research and on exhibitions that make a contribution or on care of the permanent collection. It means that the utility staff is overworked because they're constantly having to set up galleries to have parties or some big dinner or cocktail reception. That meant that you had more people to work and that meant that it cost that much more.

The whole thing became just like the increase of the national debt in the eighties. It all starts with a sort of plausible or attractive idea and then begins to snowball and it feeds on itself. Before you know it, you are in the red in a very, very big way. And that affects your mission and affects what you can do in terms of the integrity of the programs of the museum and the development of collections and the educational activities of the museum. The whole thing simply, in my judgment, led in the late eighties and nineties to this terrible financial pressure museums had developed. In this case, almost every major museum had seen the development office increase, in terms of the number of personnel involved and the budget that was devoted to the development office and the public relations office, to an amazing degree. You've had the increase of the size of the "bookstores" and the selling of unbelievable rubbish in order simply to try to raise money and make a profit.



I gave the annual convocation speech at the College Art Association [of America] in New York City that was in the mid to late seventies and it was in the [Grace Rainey] Rogers Auditorium at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I gave a very frank and critical review of this kind of activity. The Metropolitan, of course, had been the leader in it. It didn't make some people very happy, but it did make a lot of people in the College Art Association-- They were stamping and shouting and cheering at what was said. But the essence of what I said, it seems to me, was that we are so unbelievably condescending and trivializing our public when we tell them up in the galleries that these are original works of art and they are unique and you have to study and learn something in order to fully understand them, that it's part of a cultural and educational process-- That's what we tell them up in the galleries, but then in the sales desk areas and the shops, we tell them something quite, quite different: that this stuff, this rubbish, is good enough for you bums. This basically is what we're saying, and I think that's hypocrisy in a big, big way.

The best museum sales departments that I know--and there are a few of them-- One of the best museum bookshops in the United States was at the Norton Simon Museum out in Pasadena [California]. The store should be a part of the



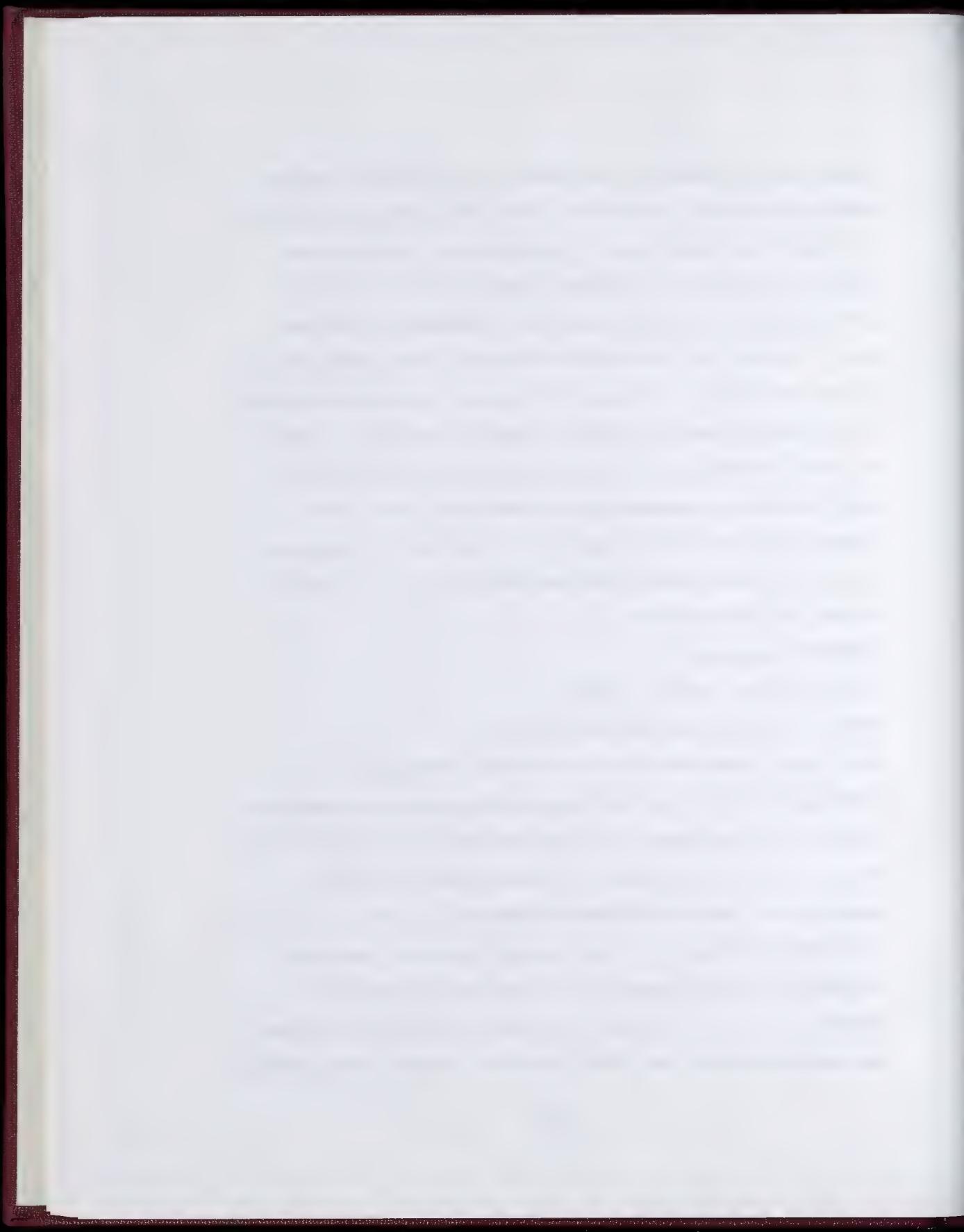
educational process of the museum. There should be the books--the popular books that will help people understand--on display and sale there. Good quality reproductions should be there. But to have a detail from a Chinese painting used as a decoration on a throwaway place mat--That, I think, is just not permissible. But every museum is now doing it: neckties with motifs, terrible imitation pre-Columbian jewelry, which ultimately one day is going to start turning up. People are going to be bringing it into curators in museums saying that they have this marvelous Mixtec gold thing, and of course it's going to be one of these damned Alva reproductions, etc. How did we get off on this one?

GARDNER: Hoving?

LEE: Oh, yes, Hoving! That--

GARDNER: The progenitor of it all.

LEE: Yes. That became a very strong tendency in the eighties, and it's part of a general tendency in American culture. Anyone knows that the highest-paid nonindustrial people in the country are all entertainers, either in sports or in the entertainment industry, in music and etc. Poor primary school and high school teachers, who are certainly far more essential to the well-being of the country, are just the peons working in the school system. The whole country, the whole American culture, has become

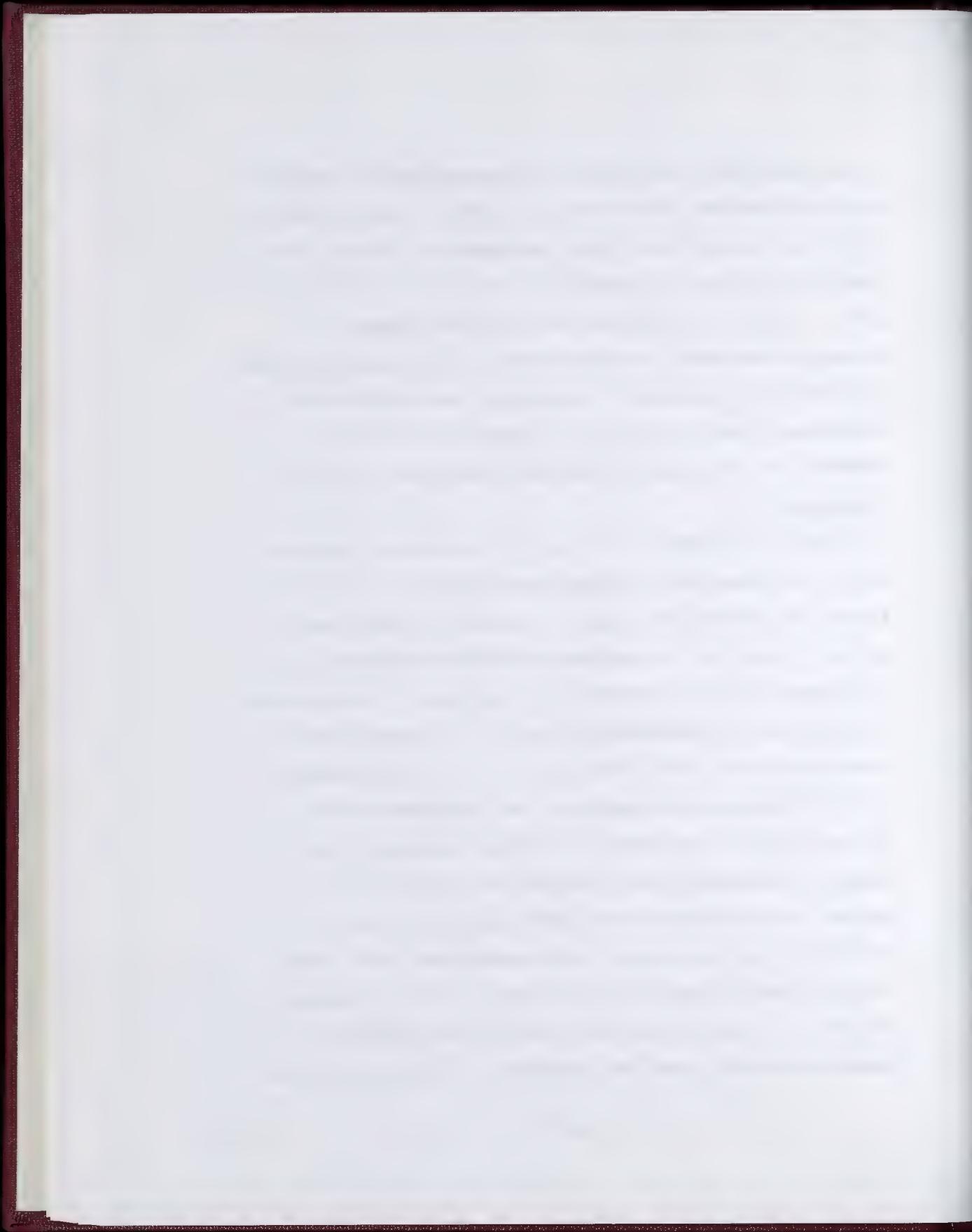


so permeated with the concept of entertainment-- What can you do to keep me from thinking or doing anything creative now? Then please do it again and again so I won't have to ever think or ever do anything. And I don't think it's good. I think it permeates the political scene. It permeates the media in terms of what the newspapers cover and what they emphasize. They're all self-fulfilling prophesies. And I'm sorry if I sound like a Jeremiah or--

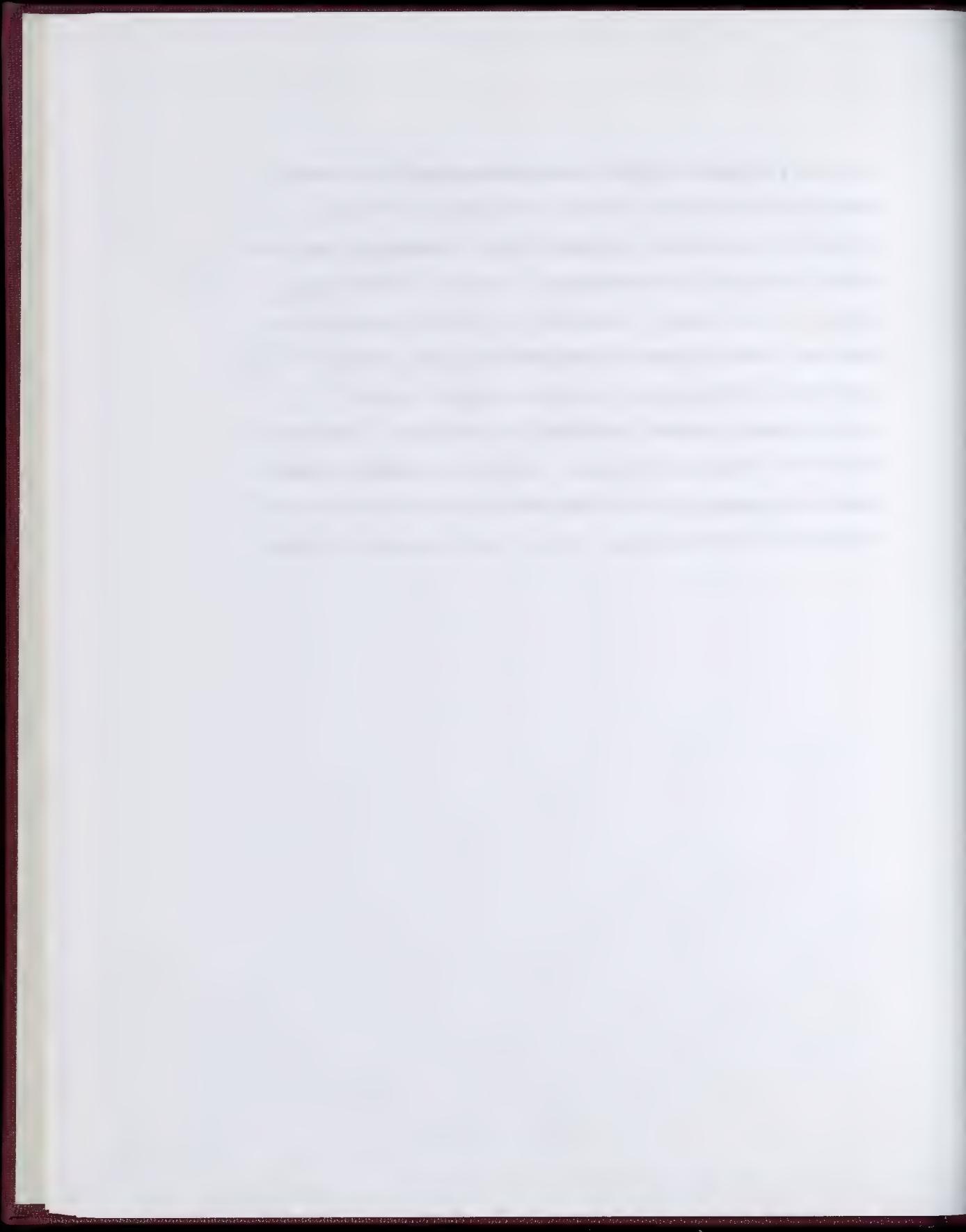
GARDNER: That's exactly the word I was going to fill in.

[laughter]

LEE: But it's true! As far as I'm concerned, it's not good. And everybody's talking about malaise. Poor Jimmy [James E.] Carter got crucified because of that speech. Now you've got all the current political situations and the conventions and everything. Everybody's talking about problems and self-examination and etc. Clearly there's something wrong, and a major part of it, in my judgment, is this entertainment syndrome, and it's been killing museums. That's why when the economy goes sour, the museums, especially those museums that-- Well, all museums, because they depend upon grants from the endowments and they depend upon foundations, etc. Many museums receive operating funds from cities or state or from the National Museum Act organization [Office of Museum Programs] under the government in Washington. As



soon as the income starts being reduced and the people have to start cutting things, what gets cut first? Schools or endowments or music, art, literature, all the things that ain't entertainment, because entertainment makes its own money. They have to, to pay the salaries they do. And so the museums gradually get pushed more and more into raising money in order to keep up the entertainment program that they've developed. The swollen staff that they've developed, just as the schools have a swollen bureaucracy--the administrators and things--are not terribly encouraging. Well, that's enough of that.

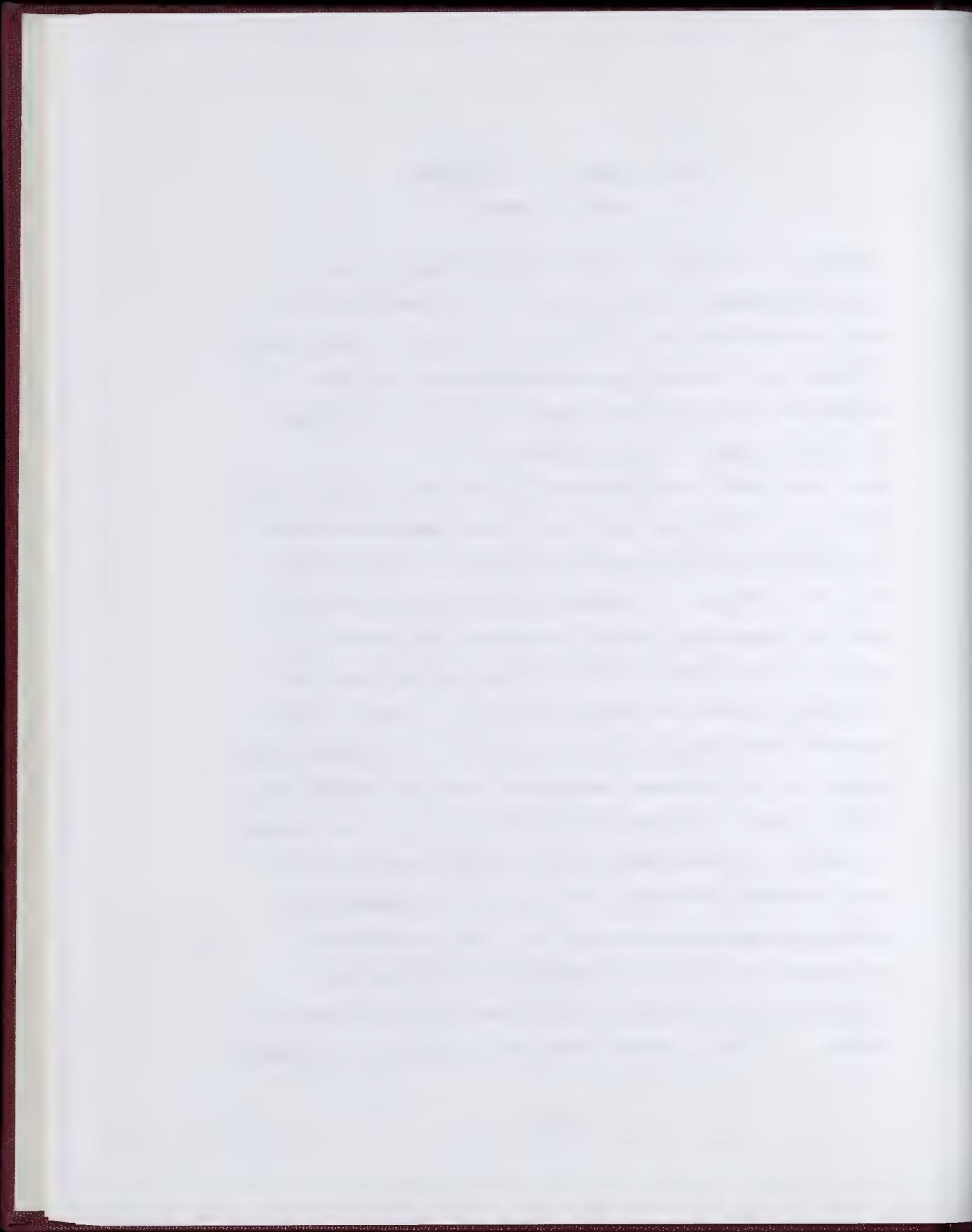


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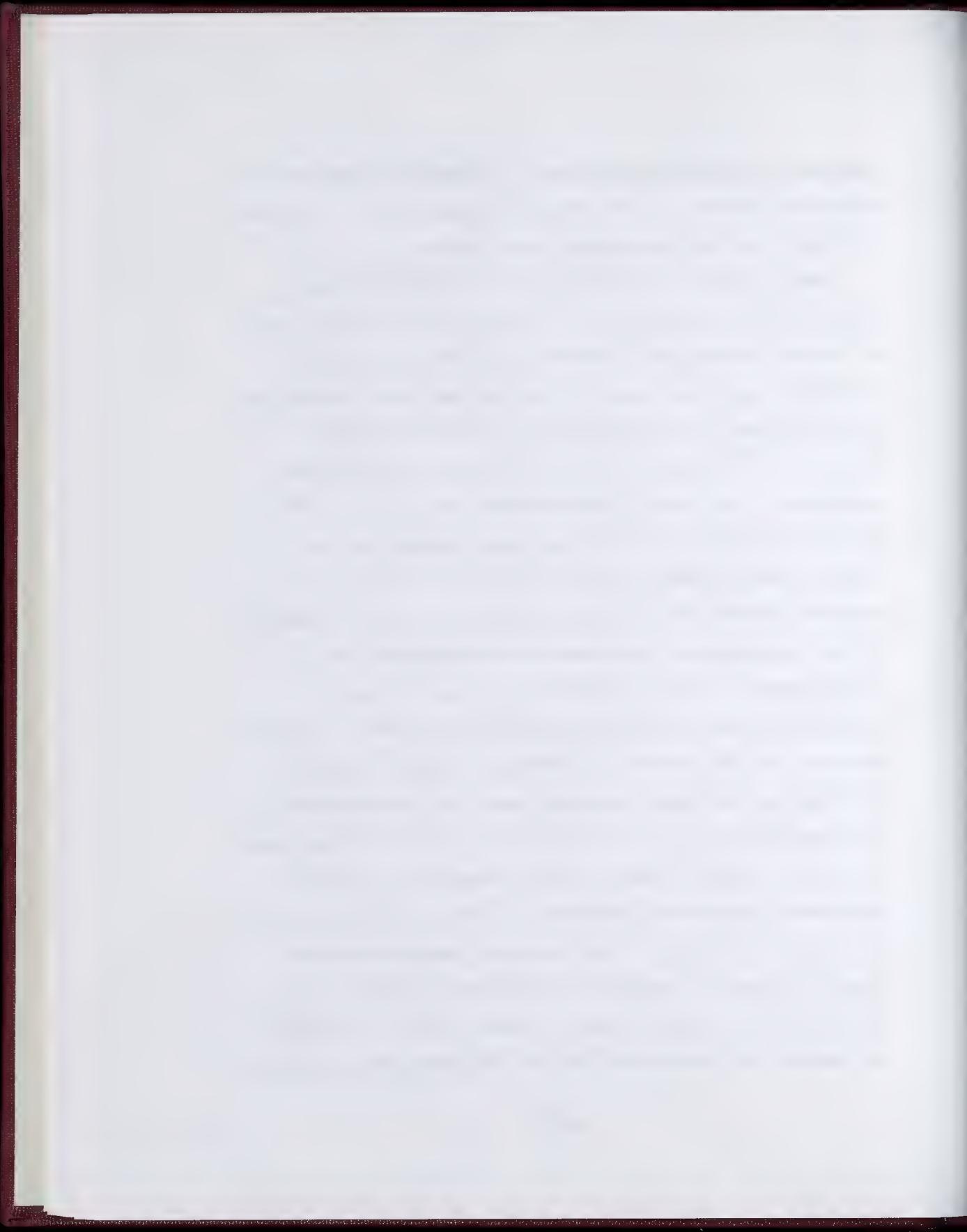
GARDNER: To return to your own exhibitions at the Cleveland Museum [of Art], one of the threads that we've kept up throughout the discussion has been the importance of education. How did you tie exhibitions into the educational mission of the museum? There are seventeen different answers to that, probably.

LEE: Yes. Well, the generation of an exhibition--a major exhibition which is going to be a major expenditure and one which you wish to make a contribution--depends upon many, many things. It depends upon individual scholars, your own curators or others, who think that something is absolutely important and that it must be done, and they convince you that that should be done. It comes from the creative minds of experts in the field. It can come from aspects of the permanent collection which are particularly strong. That, supplemented by other material, can produce an impact--an educational and enjoyment impact--within a given category of things. For instance, Treasures from Medieval France was a natural for us for our fiftieth anniversary because we had this very strong medieval collection that William [M.] Milliken had done so much to develop. It was a natural focus for a subject exhibition:



Treasures from Medieval France. So there are many ways in which the germ of a major exhibition can develop. But we also have smaller exhibitions that can be--

Well, there are two ways in which the educational mission of the museum gets involved in exhibitions: One is when you have a major exhibition. Naturally, the department gears up ahead of time so that they're able to handle gallery talks and lecture programs and seminars or colloquia or whatever you want in connection with that exhibition. But also at Cleveland we had planned and developed, as part of the educational complex in the [Marcel] Breuer wing, a set of galleries--not large but adequate--where educational exhibitions could be installed either specifically organized by the department for its own purposes in terms of education or small "idea" exhibitions that curators might develop but which were not going to be a big thing, not make any great, original contribution but which would be useful in the community. Also, you had the kind of exhibitions that the educational department itself-- People always forget the educational department people are interested in the works of art too, not just the curators. The education department would generate ideas for exhibitions that they thought would be important to do, which could be drawn from the permanent collection and pulled down out of the permanent collection

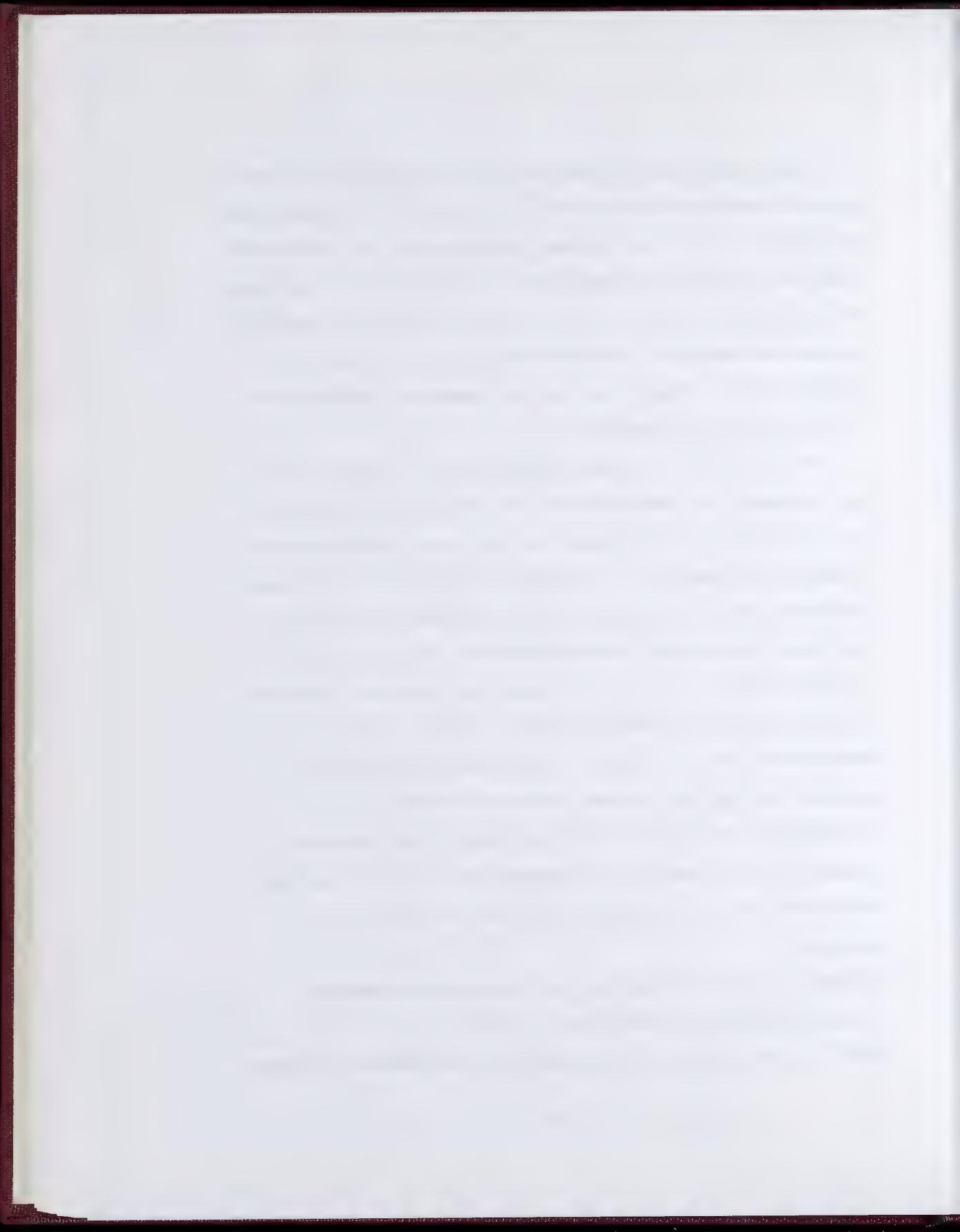


into the educational galleries, where they would be used for a focused exhibition involving a point. So there was--and there still is--a constant interweaving of educational functions, educational personnel, and curatorial functions and curatorial personnel, with the collection as the focus in the developing of these theme exhibitions that are usually there. They're up for six weeks to three months in the educational galleries.

Always, from the very beginning, Dr. [Thomas] Munro had stressed the importance of the educational department not just teaching from books and not just teaching from slides famous material from Egypt or Greece or the great European museums. Of course, you did some of that, but the focus was always on the permanent collection and original works of art as the principal means of educating people about art. Part of this, I think, came out of the Barnes Foundation, where Dr. Munro was a teacher and worked. He had, of course, taken his doctorate in educational philosophy from John Dewey. So it was a tradition that involved the permanent collection as the principal source for the educational program in the museum.

GARDNER: You were teaching at Case Western Reserve [University] during this time, weren't you?

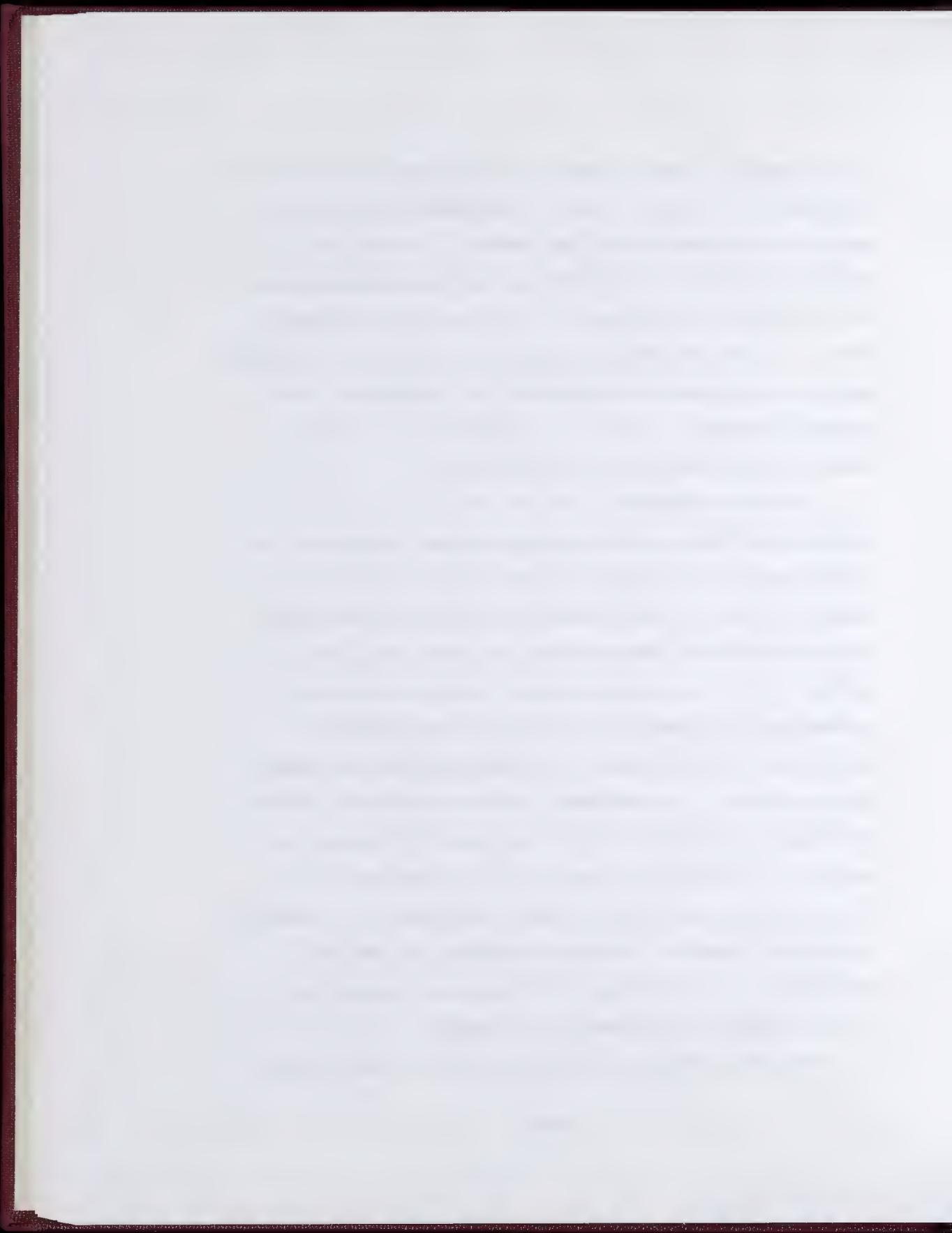
LEE: I was an adjunct professor at Case Western Reserve,



and I taught-- I mean, there was not an awful lot of time available, but I used to teach about maybe every other year or once maybe skipped two years. I would give courses, and I had about eight or ten graduate students who took Ph.D.'s. And most of them are in the museum field, and some of them have done very well. So I believe very strongly that curators should be involved in the education process, just as the educational department should be involved with the collections.

I believe especially that the director of an art museum should be a professional with some training in the disciplines of art, whether he has been trained in the practice of art--I mean, there are some very good museum directors who have been artists, who have been trained as artists--or is a professional art historian or is a professional art educator, but who is not primarily a businessman, a fund-raiser, or something that has nothing to do with art. If they don't want an art museum to have anything to do with art, then they ought to change the name of it. But if it's going to be an art museum, it means that it's got certain responsibilities as a museum: to collect, preserve, use for a display and use for delectation and education. The collection should be art if it's going to be called an art museum.

That means that you have, willy-nilly, got to deal



with the subject of art quality, because, well, it's not considered by some people today as a valid reason for studying art. Quality is a very important concept and one which, as far as I'm concerned, is demonstrable. Not perhaps as fully as would be true in an objective science--the law of gravity or quantum theory--but you can reasonably, objectively demonstrate why Rembrandt is a better painter than Govert Flinck. And you can reasonably demonstrate that a Sung dynasty landscape, like the great Hsu Tao-ning in Kansas City for example, is better than another painting which may be even of that period but is not by that great an artist. As we mentioned earlier in this discussion, the idea of quality--good, better, and best--is absolutely inherent in the world of sports and is demonstrable.

Those two words "museum" and "art" are, as far as I'm concerned, the essence of what the art museum is all about, and if it doesn't do that job, what in the hell is it supposed to be doing? Is it a social center? Is it a propaganda organ for contemporary art? I think contemporary art should find its way in the marketplace. I think museums have a responsibility, but if that's all they do, why don't they declare themselves a commercial gallery and try to make some money at it? That's what some of them are trying do now anyhow, I suppose.



So some people share my ideas. I think one finds in England and in Germany and in Italy, and to a degree in France and in Austria, a more serious and a more aware organization of museums and practice of museums than in contemporary America. I think the old civilized tradition in Europe that goes back for centuries has had a tempering effect on what has happened to museums. Some things have happened in Europe, but many of the older museums, the National Gallery [London], the British Museum, the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh and Manchester, the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge [University], the Ashmolean [Museum of Art and Archaeology] at Oxford [University]-- They're real museums and they're quite different from what many museums are trying to be. But, again, I think this sort of entertainment syndrome has been so strong in America now that it has had a deleterious effect on serious cultural institutions.

In the newspaper this morning, it's a big problem in the Wake County library system. The library has three hundred and some odd copies of Jacqueline Susann or somebody, one of its pulp writers, available for people to read. This is the library system. But Dickens's Oliver Twist is not available in one of the libraries. And the Pulitzer-Prize-winning novelist of last year is available in, I think, thirty-two copies. I mean, this is just



symptomatic. Then people wonder why students don't do well on the SATs [Scholastic Achievement Tests], and they wonder why the literacy level has been declining. All they have to do is look at themselves. They've done it. Are you going to be getting to acquisitions, or is this something--?

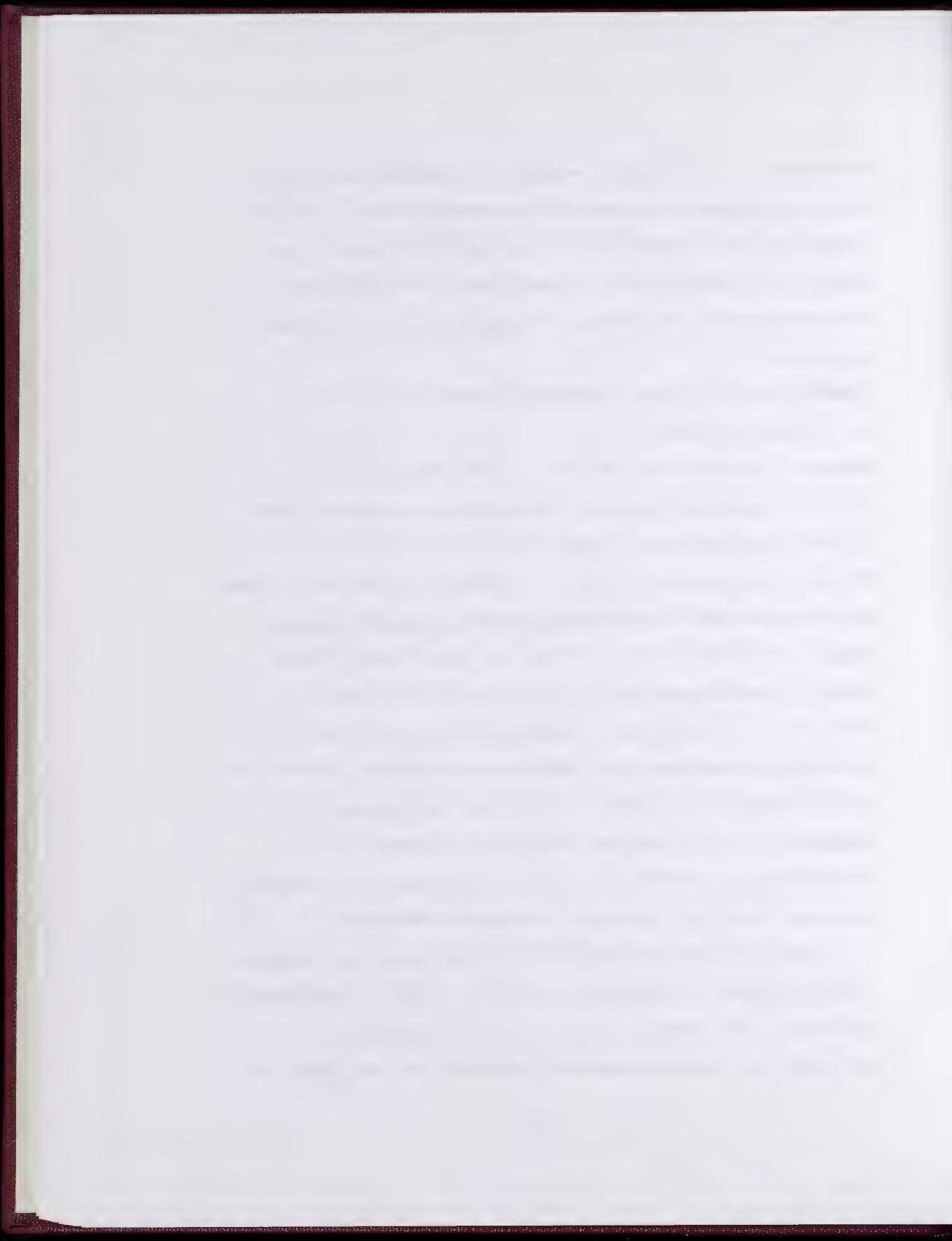
GARDNER: Well, I have a couple of other questions.

LEE: Okay, go ahead.

GARDNER: This sort of has to do with acquisitions, but then we can build from it. It sort of ties in with what you were talking about, your relationship with the Metropolitan Museum [of Art]. In 1963 you had the bidding war for Rembrandt's Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer. Could you talk a little bit about that? That seems to have popped up in all of the discussions.

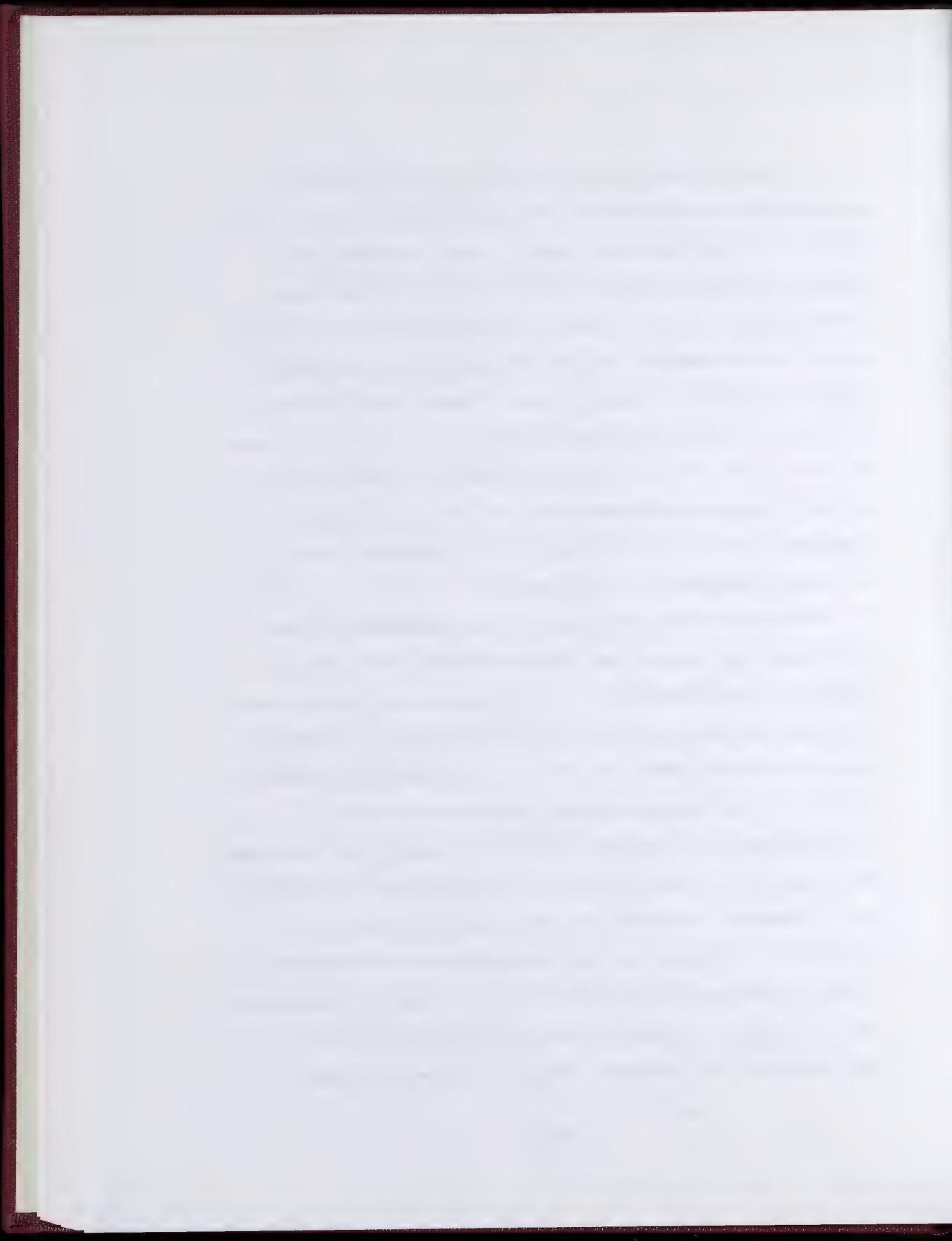
LEE: Well, it was a great symbolic event, in a way, because this was the first sort of multimillion dollar old master occasion at auction, which has now become commonplace. But that was where it all began. It's interesting how the two institutions worked at it and how they went about it and what lay behind decisions.

The word came out that the Erickson picture, acquired by Mr. [Alfred M.] Erickson in 1929, I think, from Duveen [Brothers] for something just close to \$180,000 or \$200,000, was going to come at auction. It was going to



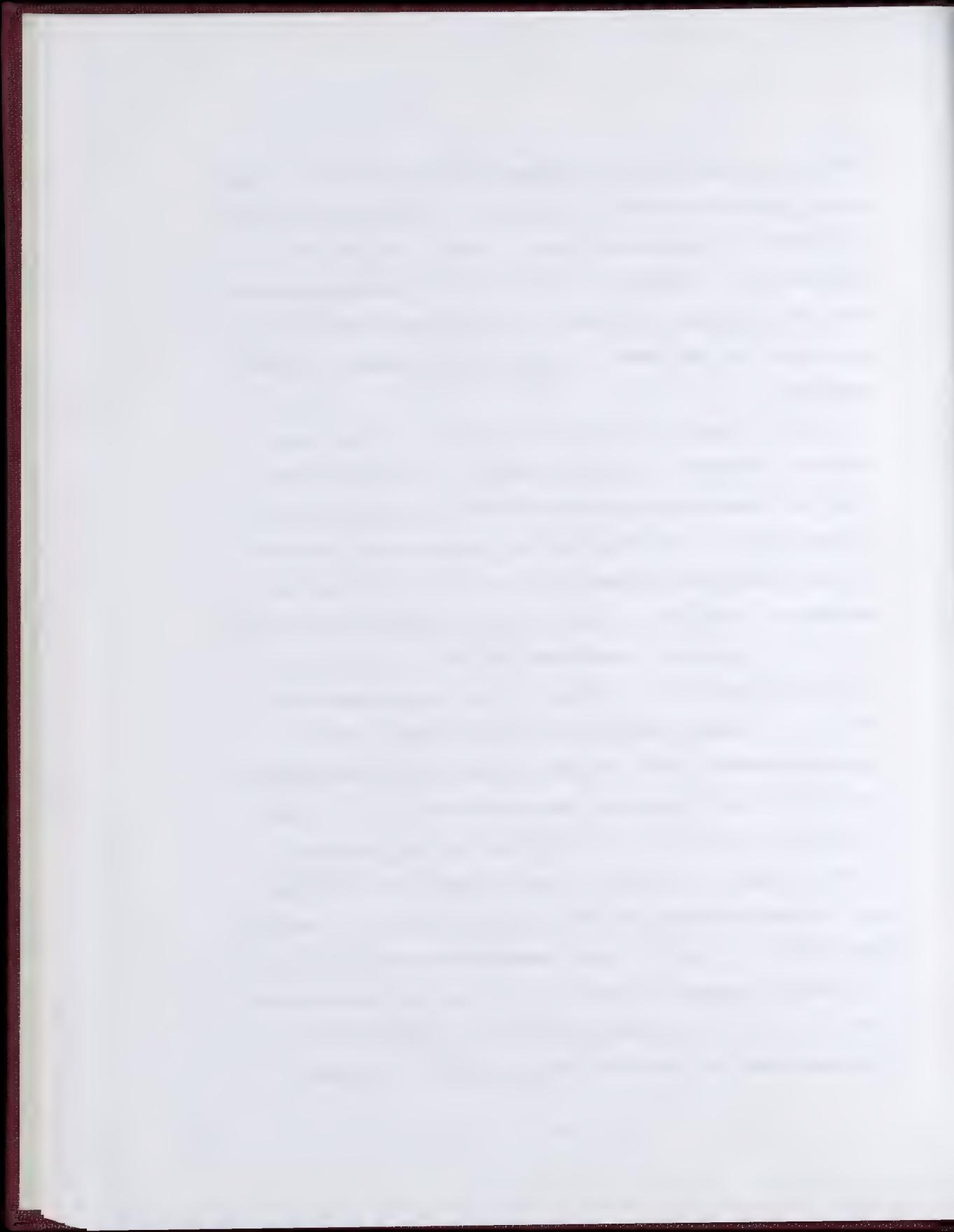
be sold, and we were told it was going to be Sotheby's. The president of our board then was Harold T. Clark. He was slightly puritanical. When I first broached the subject to him, he thought that it was something that Cleveland shouldn't go after. It was too good for us, in a way, that we should let the Metropolitan or National Gallery [of Art]-- I said, "Well, I don't feel that way and I don't think the curators feel that way and I'll bet you that a lot of the other trustees don't feel that way. We don't have a great Rembrandt and this is a great Rembrandt, and I think we ought to do something about it." We finally decided let's explore it.

So the curator and I went to the warehouse in New York where the picture was, and we looked at it very carefully. We listened to all the gossip and what prices might be, and so forth and so on. We talked to curators at staff meeting about it, that it meant we would have to spend a lot of money and would cut down on other acquisitions for a period. Everybody agreed that this was something that we really ought to go for, and I certainly did. I went to the bank of one of our trustees, Lew [Lewis B.] Williams, who told me who to see at the bank. I went to him and I said, "Look, can you pretty accurately give me what in current dollars \$180,000 to \$200,000 in 1929 dollars is?" He said, "Sure," and he did some



fiddling and then consulting and this, that, and the other thing. He told me that it came out to about \$2.2 million plus some odd thousand dollars. I said, "That's very interesting." Because the figure we had been hearing was that it was going to go over \$1 million and might get to \$2 million and so forth. I suppose other people did the same thing.

So we discussed it with the trustees. They were naturally conservative, and I think I've indicated that they felt very strongly their fiduciary responsibilities for the museum. The focus of the collecting in Cleveland had been the museum rather than the individuals who had the money. They felt we should make a very serious effort but that we shouldn't simply say the sky is the limit, that there should be a ceiling and we should observe it. And it was finally decided that the president and the director between them, and the chairman of the accessions committee, would settle on what the figure was. No one else was to know. We finally agreed on the figure of \$2.25 million plus one bid. One bid would not have been any enormous increase--a measured percentage bid. We also agreed that we ought to have somebody bid for us, someone we trusted, someone who knew all the ins and outs of the game, so we got Rosenberg and Stiebel, one of the most distinguished and oldest of the art firms. They were



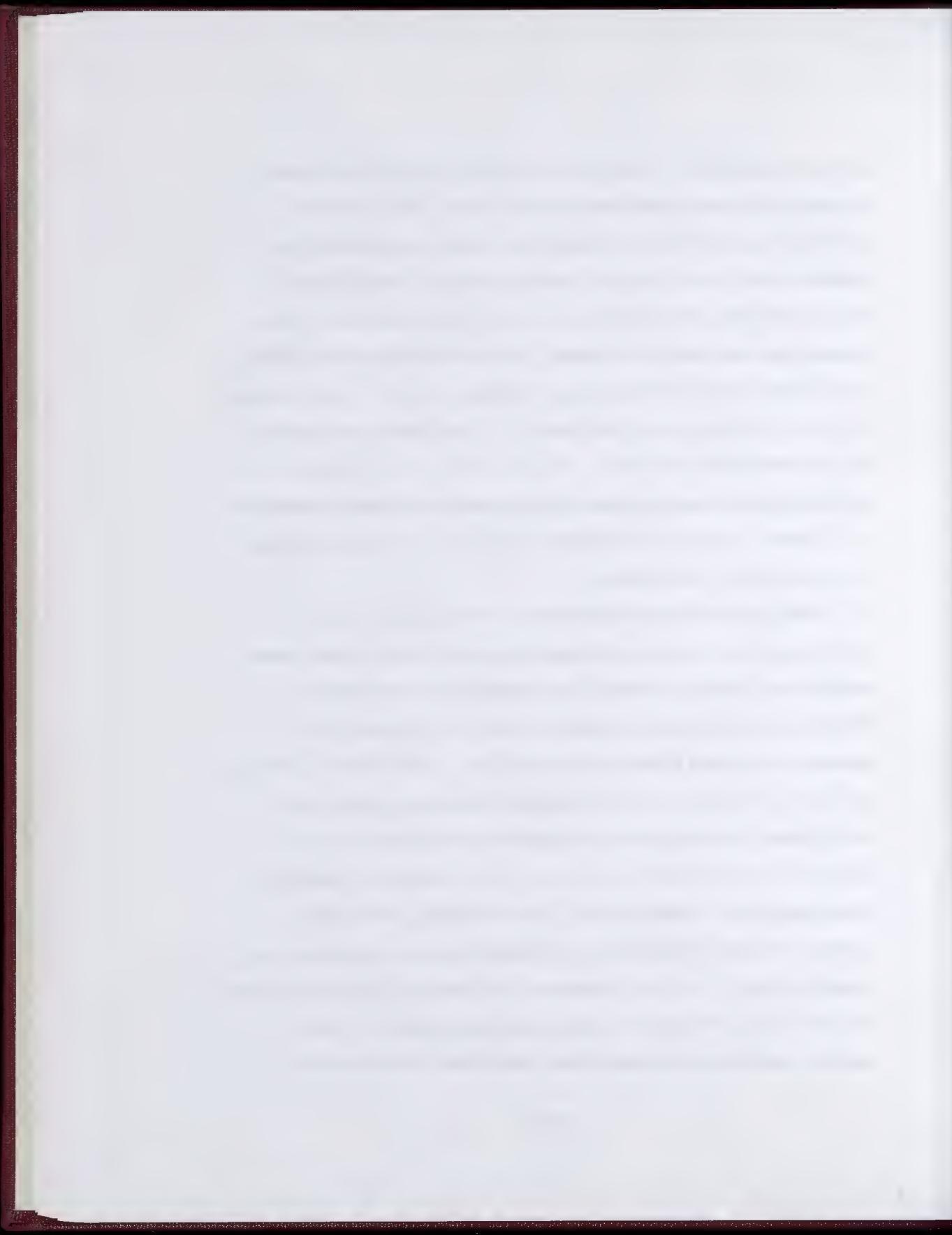
purveyors to the Rothschilds and they got Rothschild material to sell. They made the Pannwitz collection, from which we bought a lot of stuff, piece by piece. It was the logical place to go. We told them we wanted them to try to get their bid at \$2.25 million, and then if they had to go a little bit beyond that-- But I think we said not more than 5 percent beyond that.

So the great day came, and Harold Clark, I think it was, Marie Clark and Ruth [Ward Lee]-- Yes, we were in the audience. Sammy [Samuel] Rosenberg was over at the side against the wall and near the podium where he could see everything that was going on. My friend Jim [James J.] Rorimer, who was the director of the Metropolitan, and Charlie [Charles B.] Wrightsman and Mrs. Wrightsman were sitting in the first row, not far from where Sammy Rosenberg was, but they were sitting in the first row. And Baron Heini [Heinrich] Thyssen was there. I've known him quite well for a long time. He's been very helpful to the museum. He bid but dropped out. The bidding finally, after about \$1.8 million, was just them and us. Sammy Rosenberg was over there. Jimmy was doing the bidding for the Met. He had to do it himself. The bidding went agonizingly slow. I mean, Sammy Rosenberg would bid \$1.95 million. There'd be a long pause, and Jimmy would move his finger or do something and it was \$2 million--it went



up to \$2 million. Sammy got a bid in at \$2.25 million. He got it in and then there was a long, long silence. I was told by Jim Rorimer later on, after everything had quieted down, that he had been playing it very, very cagily and Mrs. Wrightsman was very, very nervous. She thought he had gone to sleep. She told Charlie to "Push him! Push him! He is going to sleep on us." And Rorimer bid \$2.3 million, and that was it. And then the picture was knocked down to them. It was over. But first of all, it was a great masterpiece and it was worth every penny of it. Today, a lot of pictures which are not masterpieces sell for much, much more.

But that was the beginning of the end of the traditional art market, because up until that time, most buying was done privately from dealers or collectors. Some buying was done at auction but not a great deal. Museums are traditionally slow to act. They don't like to get sort of stuck out in the open that way. And they won't have time to study the picture and have it on approval and so forth and so on. But Sotheby's and that, in my opinion, dreadful man, Peter Wilson, made the auction houses--Christie's followed in very quickly--the place to sell. In part because, of course, it fit in with the new idea of entertainment and also with all the wealthy people with their egos and their desires for



publicity and showtime.

GARDNER: Admiration for their wealth.

LEE: Yes. And the museums then were gradually being forced out of the active market. Because simply, one, most of them couldn't pay the prices or, two, they couldn't go through the speedy and rather risky routine that was involved in bidding at auction.

GARDNER: I have a couple of questions coming out of that. I'm going to ask you the first one. How did you feel when the bidding stopped? And what did the four of you do?

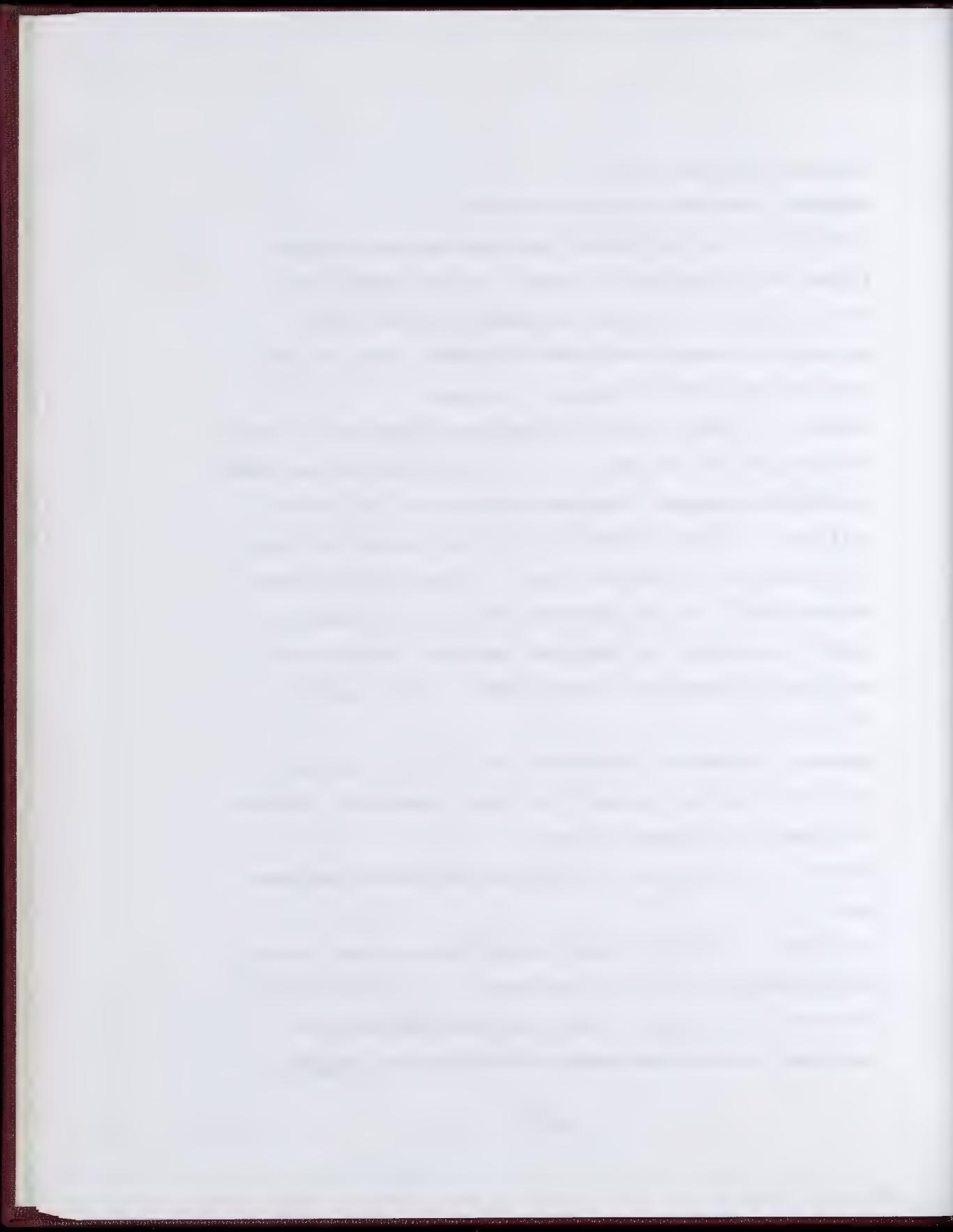
LEE: Well, I felt a sense of loss, depression, but also I've never let it last too long. I think there are other things to do. And you know the nature of a curatorial type or collector: if you lose something, you've lost it, but then you immediately think, "Well, we've saved all that money."

GARDNER: [laughter] You think about what we can do--

LEE: "What can we do now?" You see. [laughter] But no, there was a real sense of loss.

GARDNER: Did the four of you go to the Russian Tea Room and--?

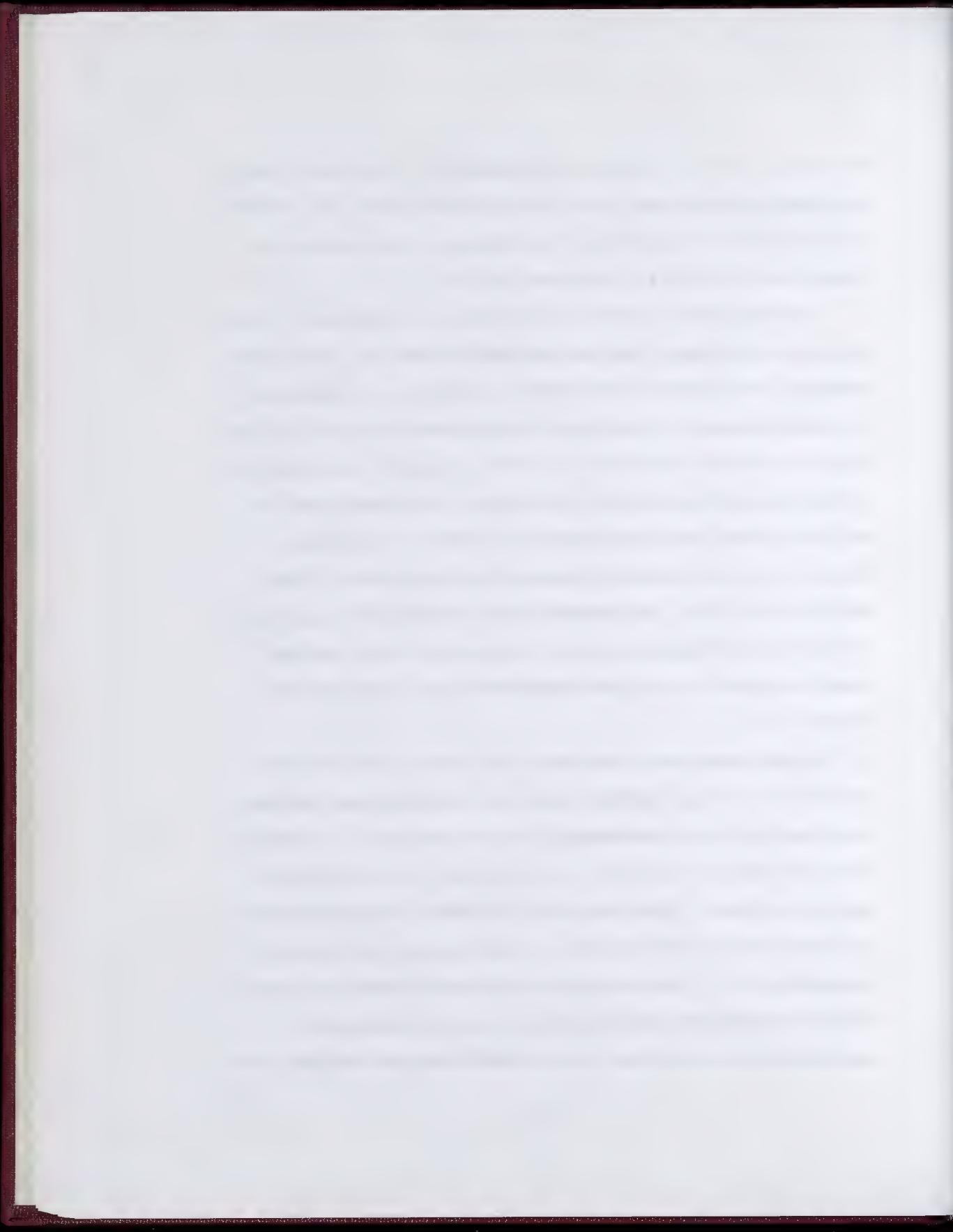
LEE: No, no. Well, I think Harold Clark and Mrs. Clark were probably a little bit relieved. But we felt we made an honest, good effort. See, Charlie Wrightsman was wealthier than all the people in Cleveland put together,



I'm sure. If he's going to be behind it, you really don't have much of a chance if he really wants to do it. And he did and Jim certainly did, Jim Rorimer. But we felt we made a good run at it, and that was it.

We did bid at auction after that time, certainly more than we had before, because you really had to. When, for example, the [Robert] von Hirsch collection of medieval and Renaissance art--principally medieval--was sold at two major successive auctions in London, we were there and we bid and we got some stuff from there. We didn't get to buy everything we wanted because the British railway pension fund had suddenly sprung into operation. That really put-- Plus, the Germans were determined to get the German medieval material, and that cut us out. We got some very good Italian and Spanish things from the Von Hirsch sale.

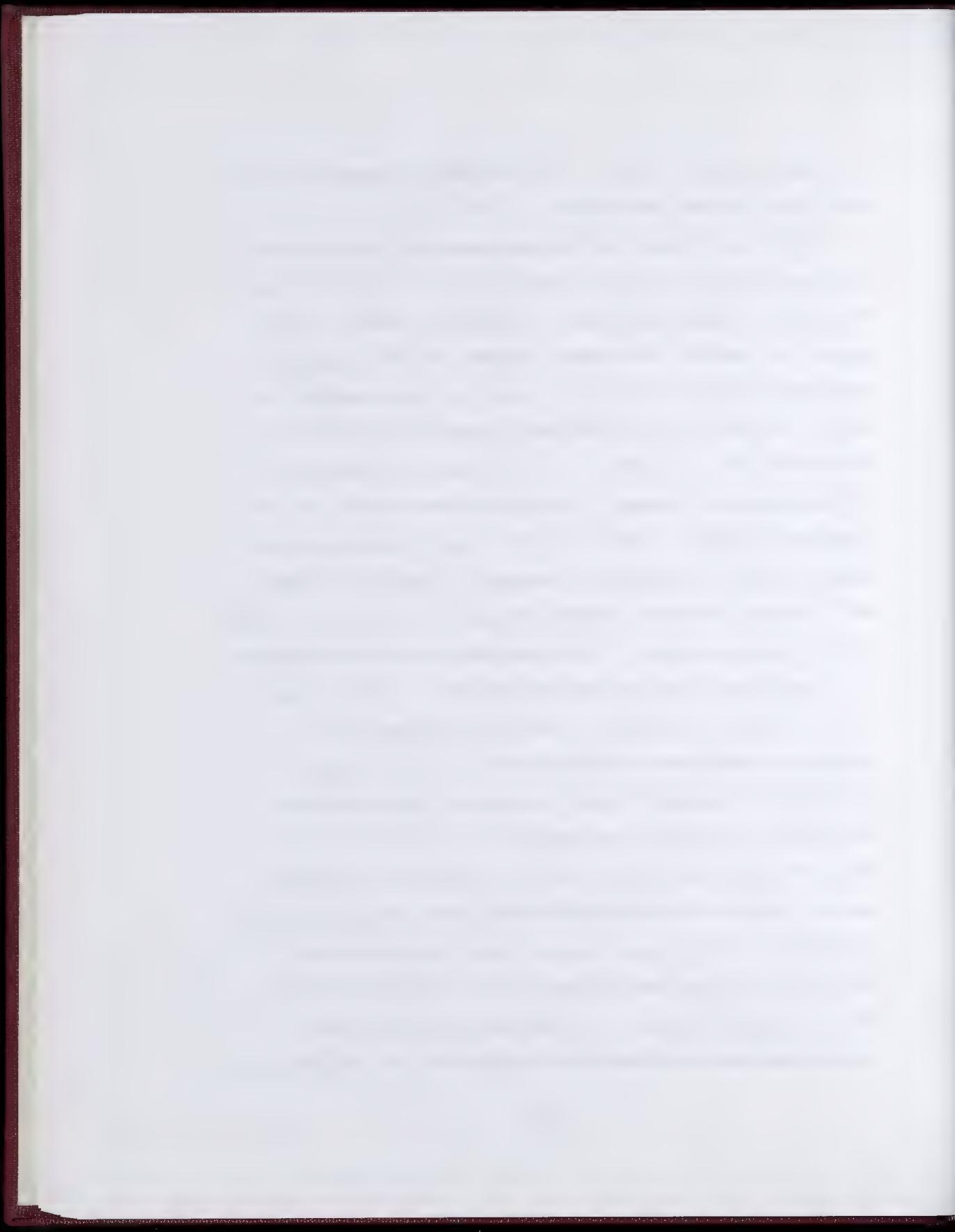
I mentioned Heini Thyssen, and this gives you some idea of how things worked later on. Henry Hawley called my attention to a forthcoming sale to Sotheby's in Geneva, where of course they don't get involved with the French export problems. They were very probably the most famous and marvelous silver objects in the history of French decorative art. The so-called Kingston tureens by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier had originally been a three-part centerpiece for a table: two tureens and one central sort



of fountain type of thing. The fountain disappeared, but they [the tureens] were coming up at auction.

Henry had started to do some homework, and he went over and studied them in London, where I guess they were. We felt that they were going to go for an awful lot of money, but we felt that since the set was not complete that there was no particular reason why they couldn't be split. So we tried to find some friends and museums who might want to go together with us. We first approached the Metropolitan Museum. Philippe de Montebello was by then the director. They said, no, their curators weren't sure. They had all kinds of excuses. They didn't want to. Then we talked to Boston [Museum of Fine Arts]. They didn't have any money. I was getting kind of discouraged.

Two of our best friends on the board were Mr. and Mrs. Severance Millikin. He was the chairman of the accessions committee and a collector. I've already mentioned him several times. His wife [Greta Millikin] said, "Well, why don't you talk to Heini Thyssen?" I said, "That's a marvelous idea!" He had been with us at the Von Hirsch sale and he sat with us for the sale, and we had done some things together that worked out very well. He's always been rather friendly with Cleveland. He was in Buenos Aires, so I got hold of his office in Lugano [Switzerland] and they referred me to and gave the



number to get him in Buenos Aires.

I called Buenos Aires and got him, and I said, "Are you interested in the Kingston tureens?"

He said, "Oh, yes indeed, I am. I am indeed."

I said, "Well, we're interested in them too. I don't see why they shouldn't be split. Do you?"

He said, "Not at all. I think it's a very good idea. Why don't we bid together on them?"

I said, "Fine. Let's do that."

We right then and there arranged for a figure. He had made some inquiries. He thought that a bid of about \$1.6 million or something like that would be sufficient. But in any case, that we ought to get them. He said, "If you want, I'll do all the arrangements, and I'll have my--" He has a dealer in Paris, a specialist in this area. I said, "Fine."

Henry had been checking, and the curators from the Louvre--two young curators--had been to look at the tureens. They reported back to the Louvre that they weren't right, that the originals may well be a pair in Stockholm. Well, the Met had said there were some problems. And Heini's curator said they were absolutely okay. Henry was convinced that they were okay. Well, you know, the art world is just as bad or worse than the world of opera or orchestra or theater in terms of gossip, in



terms of backbiting and backstabbing and everything under the sun. We made a special effort and got good black and white photographs of the pair of tureens in Stockholm. We finally got them. Henry and I looked at them, and we just started laughing. It was so ludicrous. They were thin. They were just nineteenth-century copies and had nothing to do with Meissonnier.

So anyhow, we stayed in it and Heini called me up and said, "We got them." I said, "Okay. How are we going to separate them?" He said, "You take your pick." He was just-- And the thing was, he did this bing, bing, bing, bing. No hemming and hawing, no gossip and no nonsense. Just we want to get them, let's get them. I asked Henry, "Which one do you want?" He said he wanted the one with the écrevisse, and I said, "Fine." So that's how it worked out.

But that's what you have to do in these auctions today. You've got to make up your mind. You've got to make it up in a hurry and you've got to go ahead and do it. A place like the [J. Paul] Getty [Museum] is able to do that with that kind of money. They can make those decisions on important things and they've done some very good buying at auction. But for university museums and for most museums, even Cleveland now--which has an annual income for purchases of something in the neighborhood of



\$7 or \$8 million--even they're inhibited by the current change in the art market.

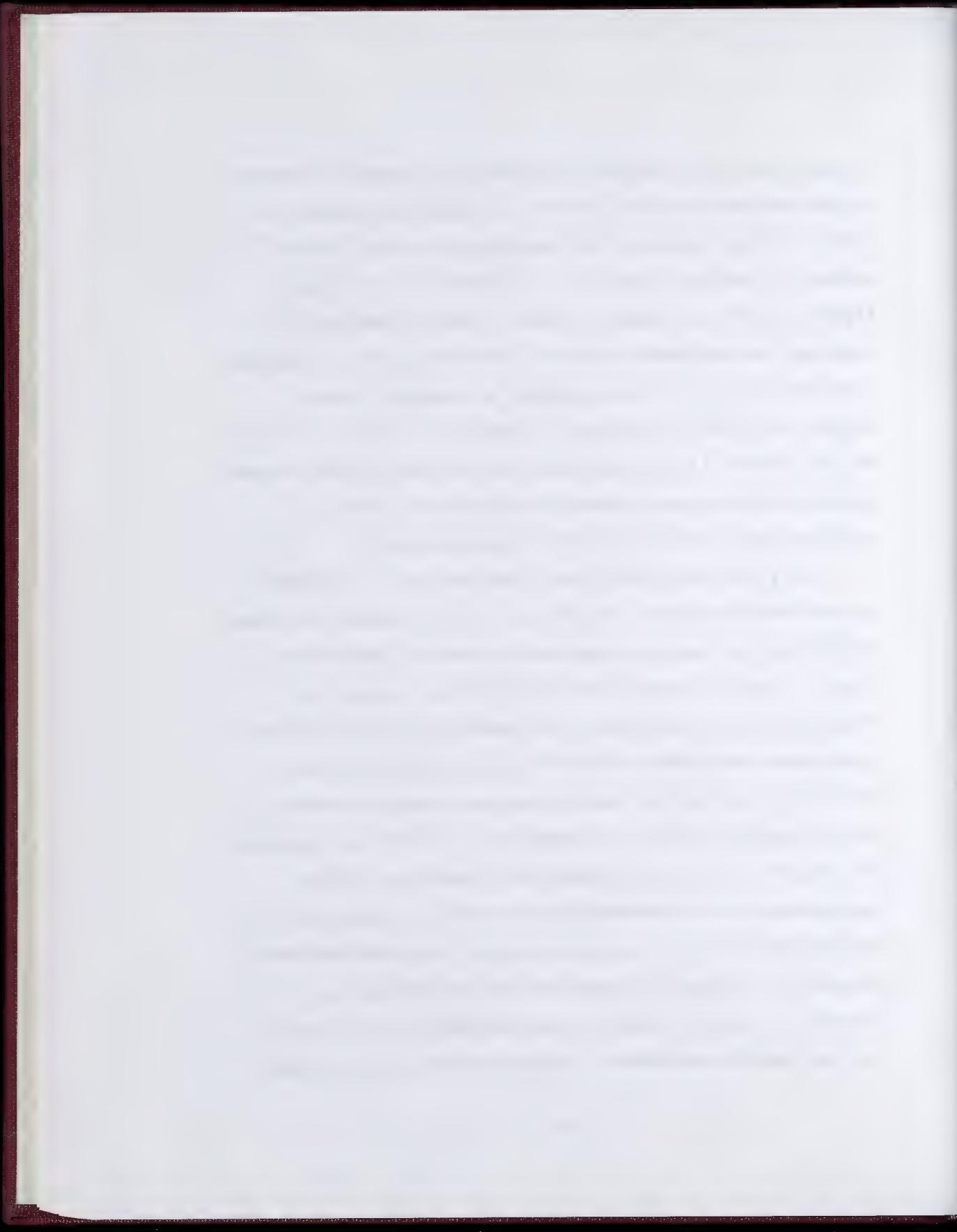
GARDNER: Okay. You wanted to talk about acquisitions?

LEE: Well, we were talking about sort of individual acquisitions. But I wanted to say something that is part of the planning that began when I became a director in '58, as to the future development of the museum. We've talked about conservation of the library, etc., etc. Well, there was also a very careful purchase analysis made. I had my assistant in the office go through all the purchase records in the museum from the beginning. I had the chart made up year by year of the amounts of money spent on different departments, broken down basically the way the museum was before we reorganized it in the late sixties. It was very, very interesting. Up until 1958, well over 50 percent of the income had been used in the field of decorative arts, which was William-- William Milliken was director and curator of decorative arts, which included medieval art, Renaissance art, sculpture, bronzes, furniture, French furnitures, ceramics, etc. Over 50 percent of the money had gone into decorative arts. In terms of paintings, it was-- I may be getting these figures a little bit off because I haven't got that chart. It's in the museum files somewhere. I would say that the figure for paintings was somewhere in the



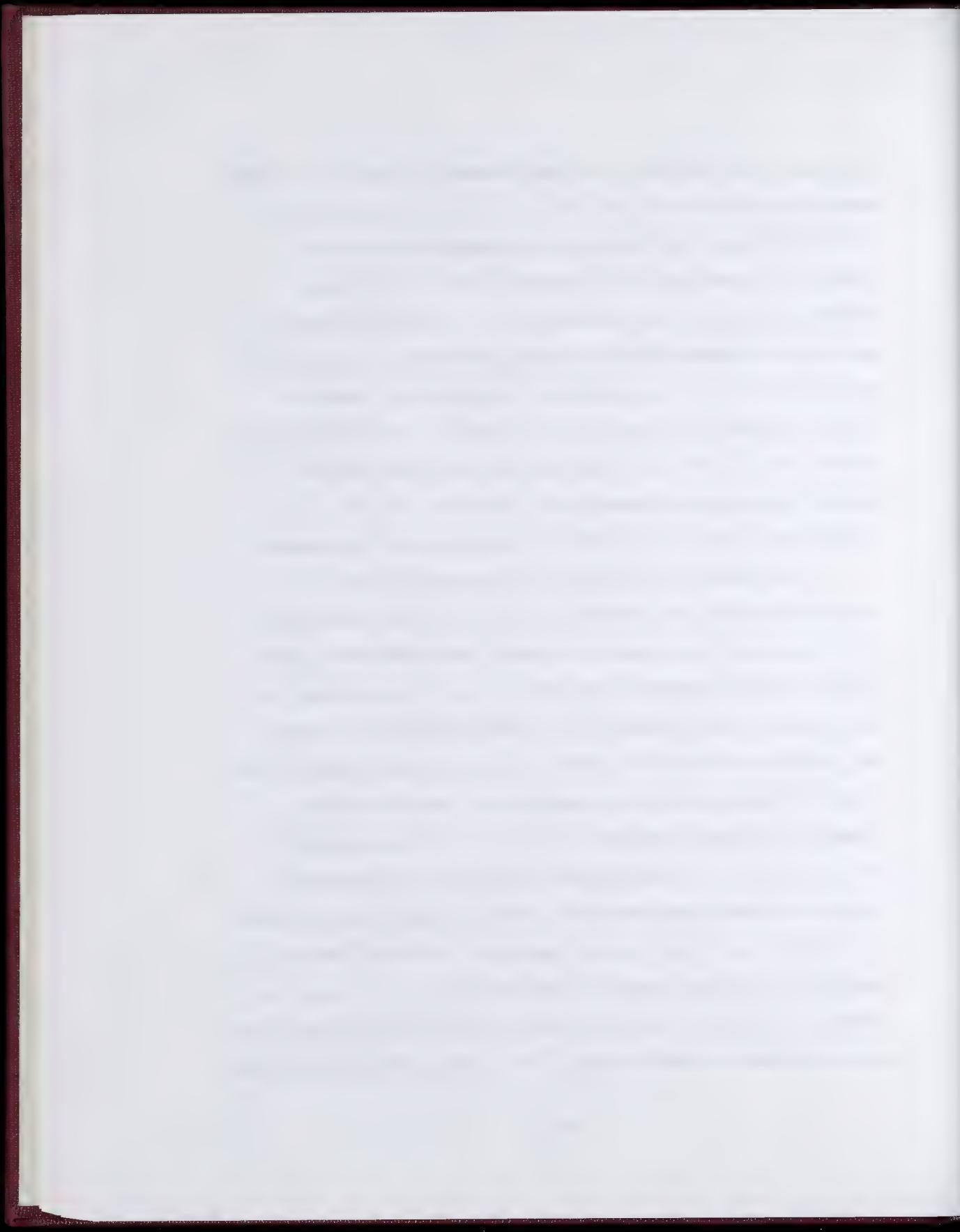
neighborhood of 20 percent; ancient art, maybe 10 percent; prints and drawings was rather well supplied; modern art, almost nothing; oriental art was fairly paltry, 6 to 8 percent, something like that. I showed all of these figures to the trustees. We had a special meeting to consider the purchase policy of the museum and I presented these charts and I also presented a program. First, giving them what I hope was-- I certainly tried to make it so and I think it was--an objective analysis of the museum collections from the standpoint of balance, needs, opportunities, and so on. What should we do?

The first thing that was clear was that, in relation to the decorative arts collection, the old master painting collection was woefully weak and it had not been wisely done. It was not one of William's strong points, the understanding of paintings. But something had to be done. I suggested now that we had this money--we had a very strong income--that we make a serious effort to develop the old master painting collections as rapidly as possible and should allot to that department something in the neighborhood of 60 percent of the funds. I suggested that for the decorative arts, particularly furniture and so on, because of the space it occupies and everything and [because it was] a fairly strong collection as it was, that we reduce the amount. Try to maintain and to keep



developing the medieval and Renaissance collections, which were very strong--not let them wither, let them continue to be developed--but maybe reduce substantially the amounts of money spent on French eighteenth-century furniture and the decorative arts. I suggested that the ancient art remain about the same percentage, because it was a market that was gradually drying up in terms of legal or quasi-legal material available. The competition was so fierce with old-time collections like the Met, Boston, the British Museum, and in Germany Munich [the Glyptothek], and so on, that it was very hard to compete.

I suggested that we had to increase the amount of money for modern art, which of course the trustees were very unwilling to do--we've already mentioned that--and that we should increase the amount spent for oriental art, one, because the director was chief curator of oriental art, and he had to have something to make him happy in the course of being director; number two, the prices for oriental art were substantially lower for top-quality material than in other fields; thirdly, we had contacts that I had developed over the years in Japan and in Europe and in New York that made it possible for us to really dominate. We knew where all the stuff was. We knew the market very well. The collection was relatively weak, and we could make it very strong. So I recommended they raise



the amount spent for oriental art to, I think, 18 or 20 percent. It was still not disproportionate, in my judgment. And they agreed. They said, "Fine." I said, "We should understand, though, that if some extraordinary event occurs, like the Aristotle or anything like that, that we should retain enough flexibility. So we cannot think of this thing as cast in concrete." They agreed, so that's what we did.

That's how we began to develop the collections. The curators knew where they were; the director knew where he was; the accessions committee knew what to expect. And it just worked. It was essential that that be done. If we hadn't, in my opinion, made a serious study and plan for that for the accessions program, considering the amounts of money we had at our disposal-- And this was before the Getty existed and before the Kimbell [Art Museum] existed. We had more money than anyone else. The Met could always get it from Charlie Wrightsman or somebody, but we had more dedicated money than anyone else. I felt we should use it and use it fast and use it as efficiently as we could, because the art market had been declining ever since the J. P. Morgan time, and it couldn't help but continue to decline. You had to make your hay while you could.

That was the underpinning that made it possible



for us to really develop, in a relatively short time, a major collection of European old master paintings and one of the greatest Asiatic collections in terms of balance of Indian, Southeast Asian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese art. I think the Cleveland collection is the best in the United States, in terms of a balanced oriental collection. The Freer [Gallery of Art] is better in certain aspects of Japanese art and in Chinese bronzes. But in terms of Southeast Asian and Indian art, they almost don't exist. In terms of Chinese paintings, we got ahead of them very, very quickly. Boston was very strong, but they just let it lie for twenty years. The collection was dead. They didn't add to it, and that hurt it. The Indian collection became weak by comparison. So with an expenditure of 18 to 20 percent, we were able to develop, over a period of twenty-five years, a great oriental collection.

We were able to develop and have a good--better than good; not great, but better than good--collection of modern art. We emphasized sculpture because I thought that, one, the museum was weak in sculpture, two, sculpture was a much better buy on the market than painting. It always has been. So we went particularly after sculpture in the European field, and we did very well. We developed a German baroque collection, German and Austrian baroque collection, which I think is



the best in the United States. It was done with some degree of improvisation--there has to be--but the fundamental base for the development of that collection was that job that was done in 1958 to get the trustees to understand what was needed and how to go about doing it.

GARDNER: In 1962, Harold Clark stepped down as president, or was replaced as president by Mrs. [Emery May] Norweb. What were the circumstances of that?

LEE: Harold died.

GARDNER: Oh! Did he? I thought he stayed and remained as a trustee for a few years after that. I see.

LEE: No, no. Harold died. Ruth and I were driving in from Gates Mills [Ohio] early one morning. We'd been out. We were driving down Fairmount Boulevard. Harold's house was on Fairmount Boulevard, and as we came by, I saw a police car and another limousine there which was not his. Harold didn't spend money for show. He was very-- She was a Christian Scientist. They were very proper, sort of Bostonian types--live off the interest of the interest. He wasn't a frightfully wealthy man. He was a lawyer. He had been an assistant to Newton [D.] Baker in World War I. He didn't like the law firm so he went out on his own. He had his own office and he was not a terribly wealthy man. But anyhow, we saw something had gone on there. We got home and I called over to Marie, and Harold had just died.



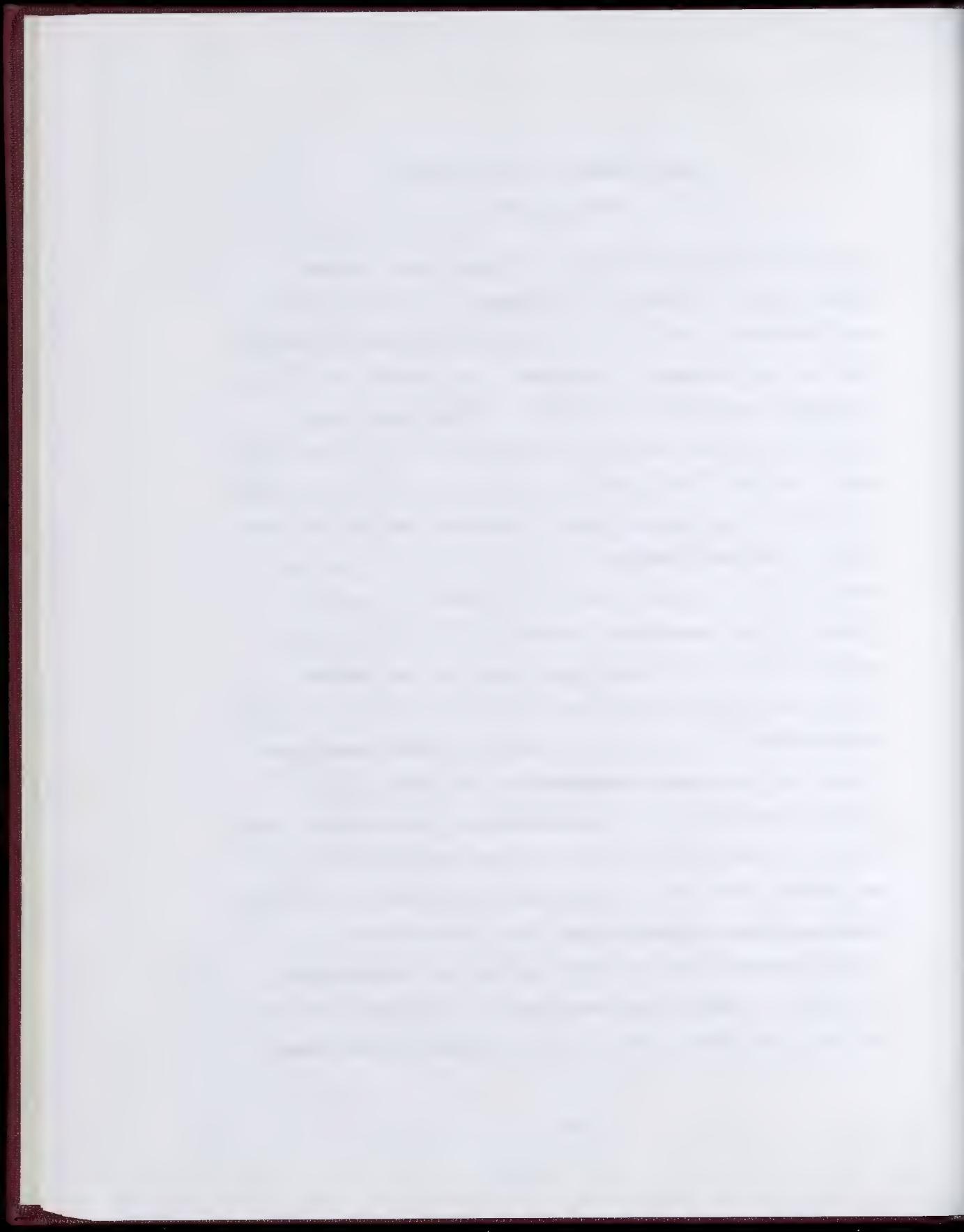
So Emery May Norweb was then in line and the next president. She was quite, quite different. Harold had not a terribly great sense of humor. He had been a tennis player in his youth. That's one of the reasons he liked me and I could get along with him, because I played tennis. He was not a collector. As a lawyer, he did good. That's what he did. And Mrs. Clark was very much that way too. She did not have any sense of humor. Emery May had a great sense of humor. Puckish and sometimes, as I told you earlier, deadpan, pulling-legs jokes which could be very disconcerting. She had a very good mind. She was a good collector of her specialty, coins. She'd been a diplomatic spouse. Her husband, the Honorable R. Henry Norweb [Jr.], had been the ambassador to Portugal during World War II. He was in the foreign service. They had been in Peru in diplomatic service. She had collected quite a bit of pre-Columbian material then, including the greatest single painted Peruvian textile in the world.



TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE TWO

JULY 14, 1992

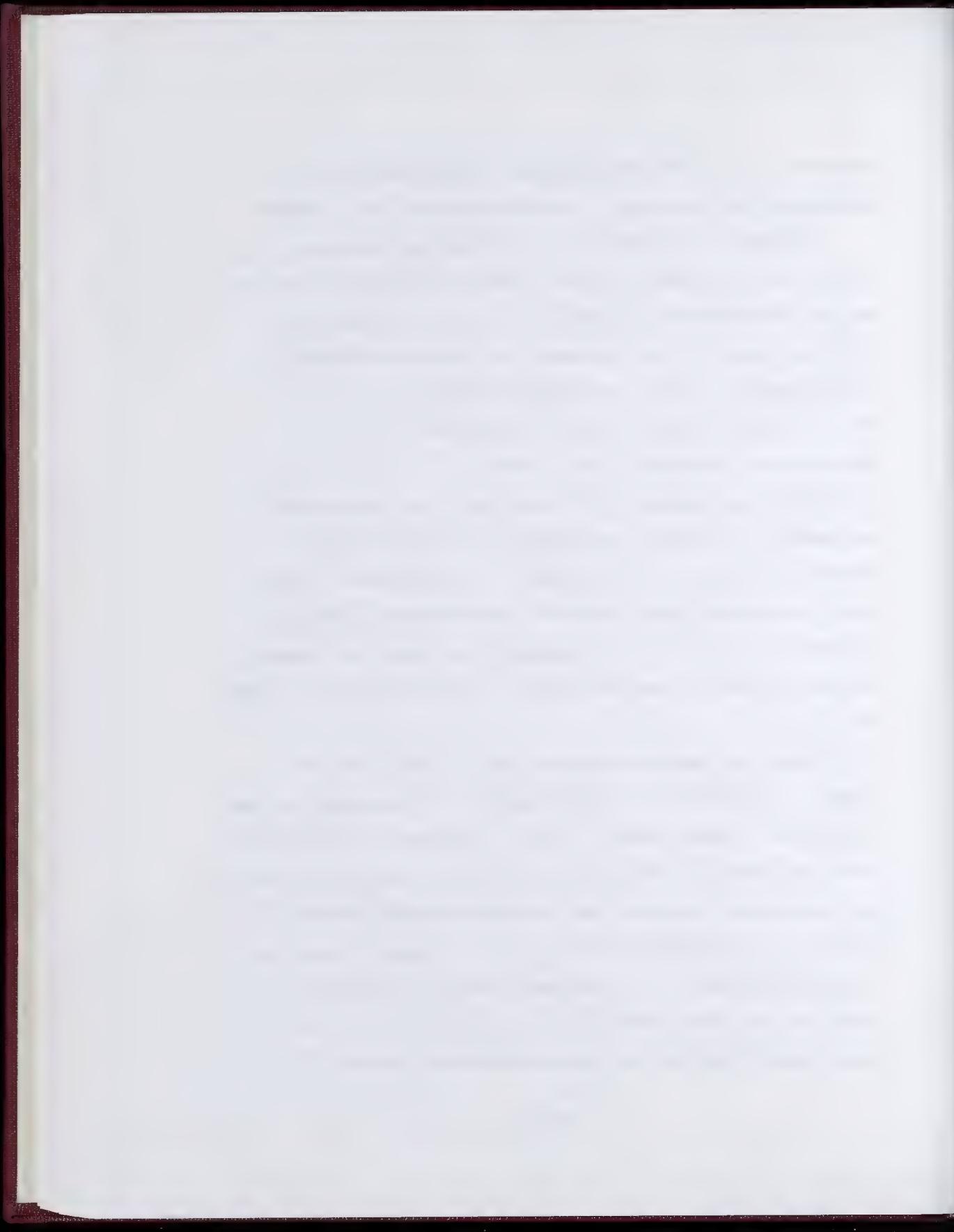
LEE: She was very short and, in later years, became rather plump. She was not an elegant-- She had a very, very good mind. She didn't like any surprises but she did like to run the board of trustees. Our system, which she initiated, was very, very simple. Before every board meeting, which was held at the Union Club for a long time until, as I will tell you or-- I hope you will let me tell you about how we changed that. We always met at the Union Club in downtown Cleveland. It was usually a luncheon meeting at one o'clock, and we would meet at twelve o'clock in the women's bar downstairs. I would have an agenda and she would have some ideas that she wanted there, and we'd go over it and figure out what it was that we wanted to do. She had very definite ideas about some things, but she never trespassed on the professional artistic expertise and responsibilities of the staff, the director. Her interests were in some events coming up or the dinners that would be necessary in connection with the Treasures from Medieval France, what to do about the French ambassador and the director of the Bibliothèque Nationale. These things concerned her very much, and she had very good ideas. She put her shoulder to the wheel



and did a lot of the entertaining. She took a lot of responsibility that way. We got along very well indeed.

The board of trustees did not have any non-Wasp member when I became director. Harold Clark was a man who was not particularly, I would say, liked by some of the trustees--many of the trustees--one, because he didn't have a sense of humor, but two, he was too liberal for them. He was either a liberal republican or a conservative democrat, I don't know what. But he was interested, as Leonard [C.] Hanna [Jr.] was, and Harold was Leonard's lawyer. Harold had no sense of humor; Leonard had a great sense of humor. Harold didn't drink, chew, or go with girls who did. Leonard was a libertine in many ways. He was a homosexual. He loved the theater. He was a friend of Bea [Beatrice] Lillie, and so forth and so on.

I said to Harold and Harold said to me-- We had lunch. I'd occasionally have lunches with him down at the Union Club. Never, never a drink. Whereas if I had lunch with Lew [Lewis B.] Williams, who was ex-Federal Reserve Bank president and so on, he always had drinks before dinner. We ate down at the men's bar, whereas Harold and I always had lunch up in the men's dining room. Lew would tell me that Harold didn't look very well. And Harold would tell me that Lew was killing himself by

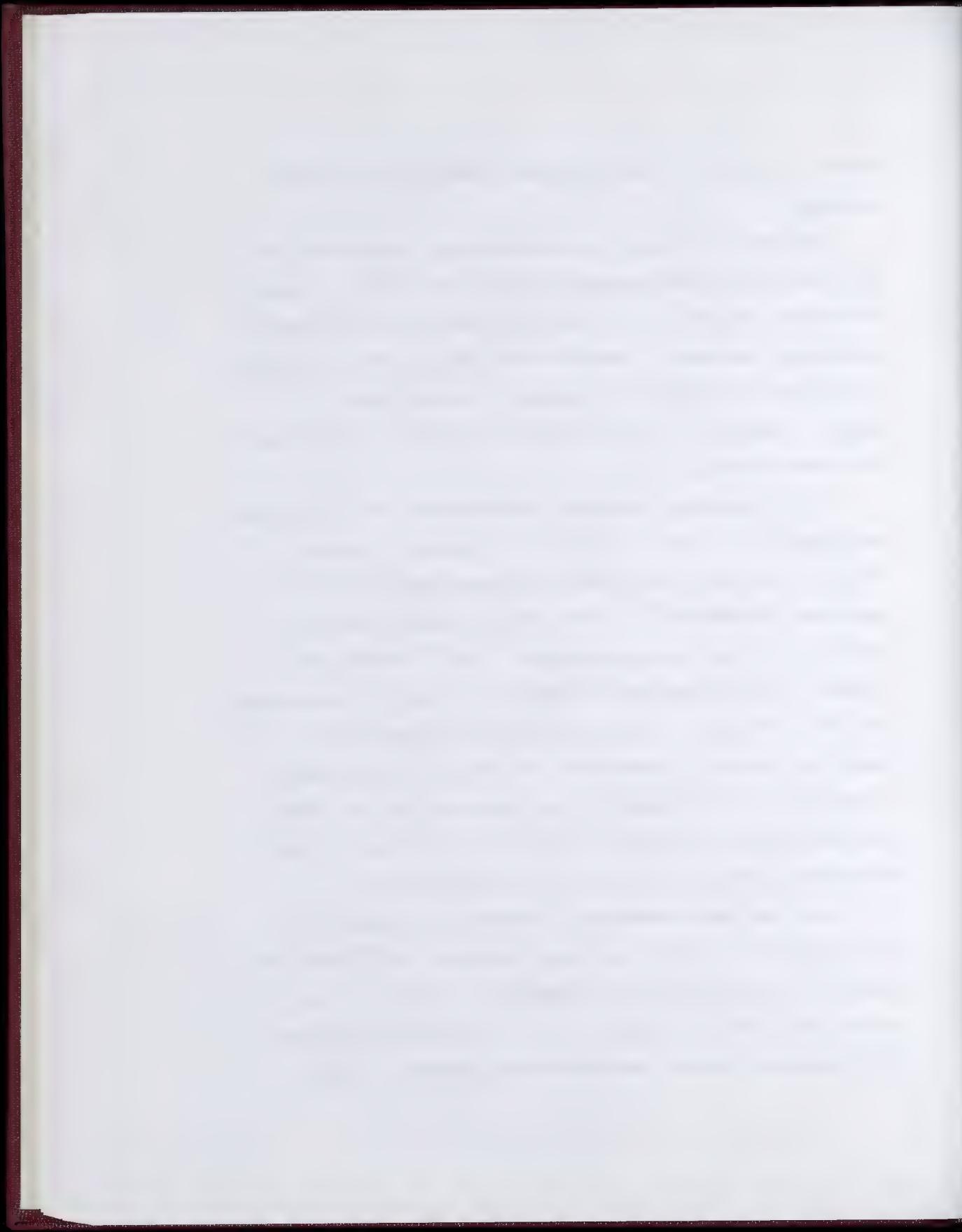


drinking too much. And, you know, they knew each other very well.

But Harold had good ideas about more democratic and more socially aware representation on the board. I said, "You know, Harold, it's a disgrace that we have no Jewish members on the board. They're some of our most culturally intelligent and supportive people." And he said, "I agree. Absolutely. We've got to do something about that. I've been meaning to do it."

So fortunately, everybody could agree. There was one man, Edgar [H.] Hahn, who was also a lawyer, a great friend of Harold's and a very civilized and cultured gentleman, a widower. I think that's right. Ruth can tell you. Maybe he was a bachelor. No, I'm sure it's widower. He was very much interested in books, rare books and that. He had a nice, old-fashioned house not far from Emery May Norweb's. And Emery May liked him very much. He was very, very friendly. So, by golly, we got Edgar Hahn as trustee, and he was a big help. He went on the accessions committee and he was very, very good.

But, you see, there was a problem too because the Union Club didn't have any Jewish members, and I said to Harold, "You know, we really ought not to meet at the Union Club. This is first of all a business thing, and it's socially elite. The museum may pretend not to be



that, but it really is, and you don't want it to be that. Why don't we meet where we do business? I mean, to get these people into the museum. Some of the trustees haven't been to the museum for several months on end." So we shifted the venue of the trustees' meetings to the museum. Then finally, a little later, the Union Club began to loosen up a bit, and Edgar became a member. Later on when Emery May was president, we got another friend of hers, Rabbi Daniel [J.] Silver, who was the son of Rabbi Hillel Silver, the famous Jewish leader. Dan, who was a great friend of ours--and his wife [Adele Silver] still is a great friend of ours--became a trustee, and he went on the accessions committee too. He also went on the education committee when they formed that. He would speak up at meetings and tried to get some of these more conservative trustees to understand that the world was changing and that they had to reach out some and that they had various problems they ought to be paying attention to and they just couldn't ignore them. He was a very, very helpful trustee.

Since that time, Dan died. He had a terrible brain problem and died untimely. Dan Silver was elected in 1970. Edgar Hahn died in 1970. It was just a brief overlap. Then in 1975, when Dan Silver was a trustee, there was a local collector whom I got to know named Noah



[L.] Butkin who collected nineteenth-century realist and academic French painting. He was one of the reasons we had the exhibition on French realism [The Realist Tradition in French Painting]. He gave all the collection to us. He was very important and he became a trustee. So we had then two Jewish members. In 1978, Norman [W.] Zaworski-- He's Catholic, but Polish. He was from the Polish group in Cleveland.

GARDNER: Was he the first Catholic?

LEE: No, no. There were other Catholics. Jack [W.] Lampl [Jr.], who was Jewish, was elected in 1984, Morton [L.] Mandel in 1989, and Mary Manning Wassmer in 1991. So, I mean, we broke that. And Harold did it. Harold is a very important figure in the history of the museum.

[tape recorder off]

GARDNER: Okay, the next area that I'd like to move into, now that we're both refreshed, is the relationship between the museum and the city of Cleveland. It was interesting hearing you mention the makeup of the board and so on. Was there ever a black member on the board, for example?

LEE: Not to my knowledge. I don't think there's been a black member. I can't say in the last few months because of everything, but I don't think so.

GARDNER: Well, your relationship--you, Sherman Lee, and you, director of the museum--was very close to the city of

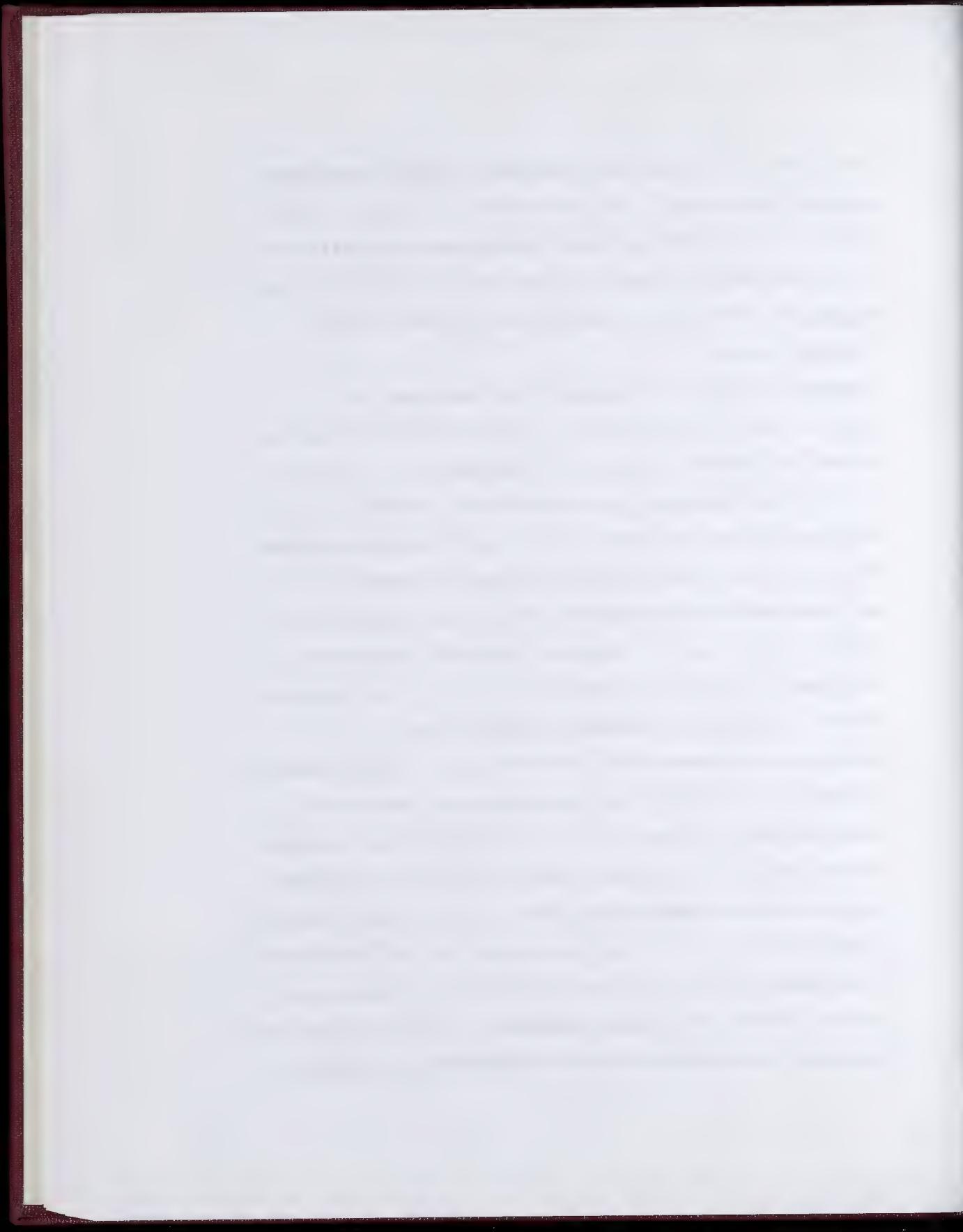


Cleveland. The 1960s was a period of turmoil everywhere, in every major city. Did that affect the museum at all?

LEE: The clear symbolic event which very much affected the museum was the bombing of the Rodin sculpture of The Thinker in front of the museum, one of the artist's lifetime casts.

GARDNER: How did that happen? Who had done it?

LEE: We don't know who did it. We know that the police or the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], whoever it was, told us that the timer on the fuse on the bomb had been stolen from the Boston navy yard. They could trace that. But they never did pin it down to anyone. As to why Cleveland was selected for this event on March 24, 1970, I don't know. I think all kinds of suggestions had been made: that it was the work of out-of-town radicals, that the museum was selected because it was a conspicuously conservative institution or a conspicuously wealthy institution or just a conspicuous target that would be easy of access. I don't think anyone knows why. I think that it's perfectly feasible that they may have thrown a coin to decide what museum to do. There are all kinds of reasons as to why Cleveland. But it represented an art museum, and, as I said here, what is reasonably certain is that the bombing signaled an attack on art and education institutions in their traditional positions

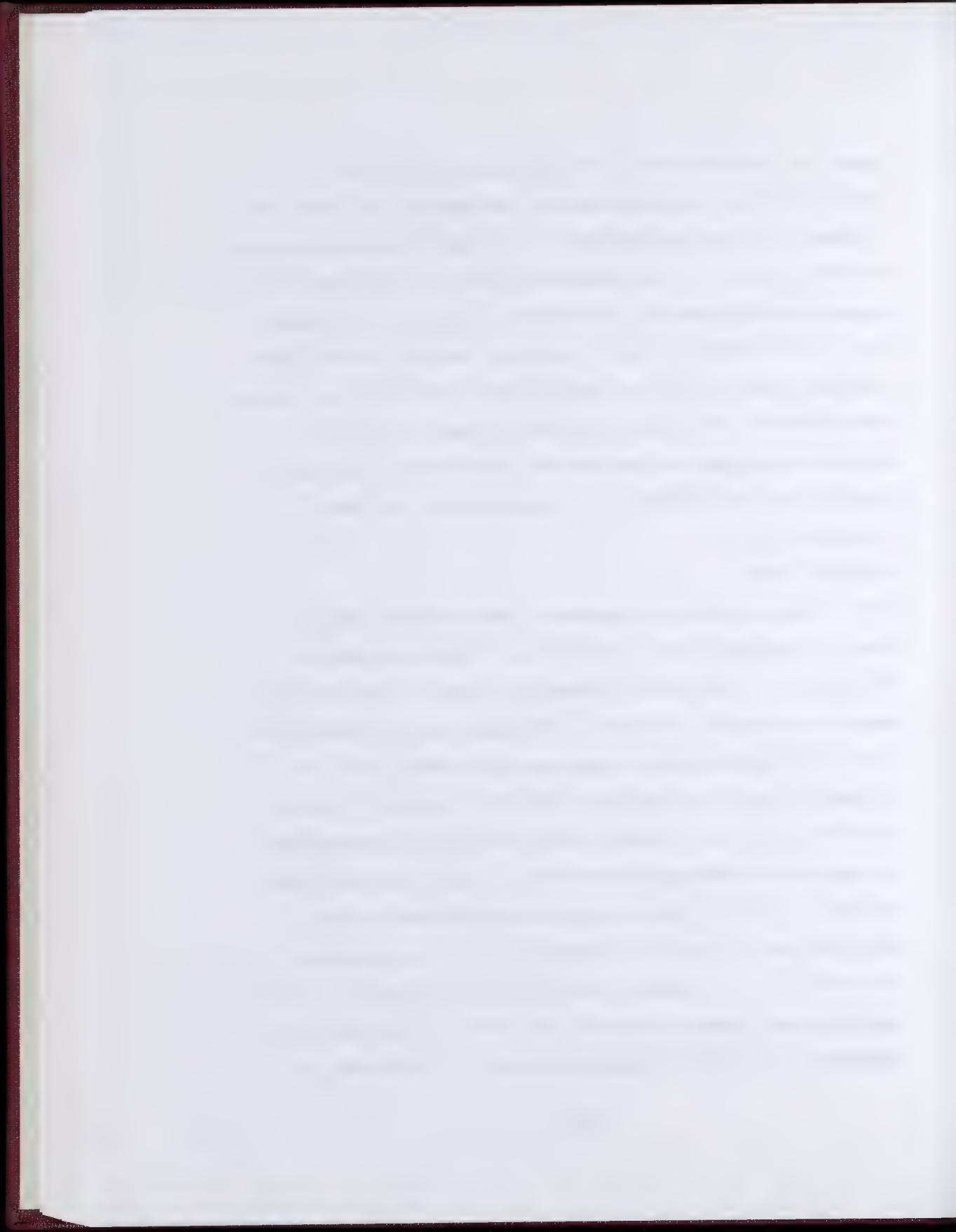


above the fray of social and political contention.

"Relevance" was the cant word of the day and for some time to come, but its application to museums threatened greater harm than good. It was towards the end of that period of dismay and turbulence. It certainly wasn't an aftermath, but it was certainly one of the last serious things that happened, and I, for one, simply don't know why the museum was selected. We know why we put it back up in its damaged state and we know why we commemorated the event on the back of the pedestal, the new pedestal for the sculpture, but--

GARDNER: Why?

LEE: Well, we had a big debate. The trustees wanted to have it repaired, and I said I didn't think we should. First of all, the actual aesthetic effect of the sculpture was not seriously in danger. The signs of the damage were clear, but Rodin himself approved clay models that he dropped on the floor and that had been damaged. He was interested in the effects of accident, and I thought that it would be in his spirit to leave it as it was and also I thought we should face the fact that this event had happened and it should be recognized. We were as much involved in it as anyone, and so let's just put it up with the notation "Damaged on March 24, 1970." That was the rationale, and the trustees bought it. I, for one, am

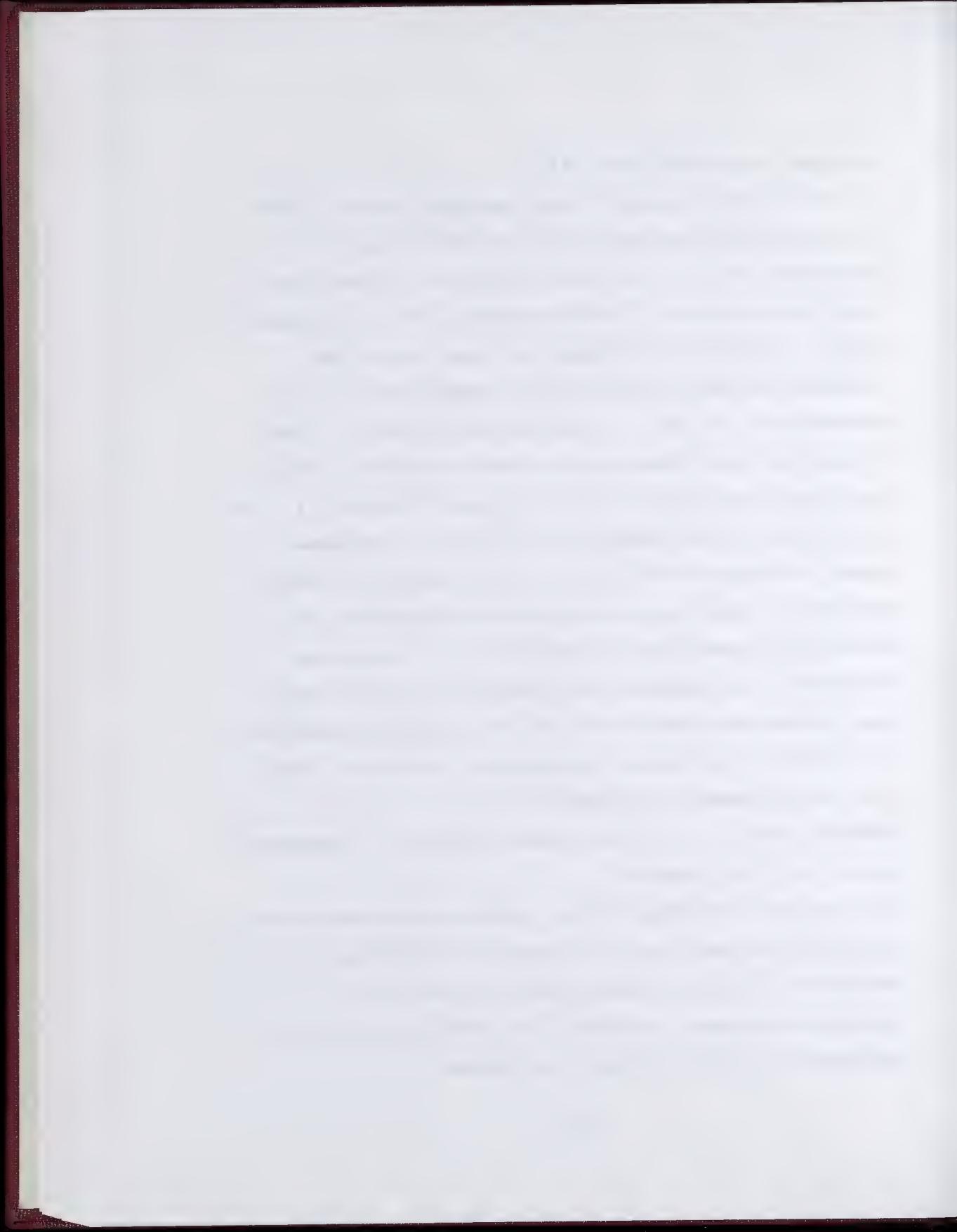


glad that we did not repair it.

As to other things, I would say that frankly I knew pretty much what was going on in the educational department and in the children's programs. I keep track of all those things. I would say that I know of no other major or significant problems that arose out of the turbulent sixties in terms of the museum's program or-- Remember that we were building the Breuer wing. It was finished in 1971. That was just one year before. The museum was under construction from late '68 until '71. In the process of that construction we had to close some areas, because we tore out the old auditorium in order to make new oriental galleries, so that whole part of the museum was closed. So the museum was on a restricted program for the period of 1968 through 1971. That may have had something to do with the fact that the museum was not affected very much by the troubles. It wasn't open that much because of the construction.

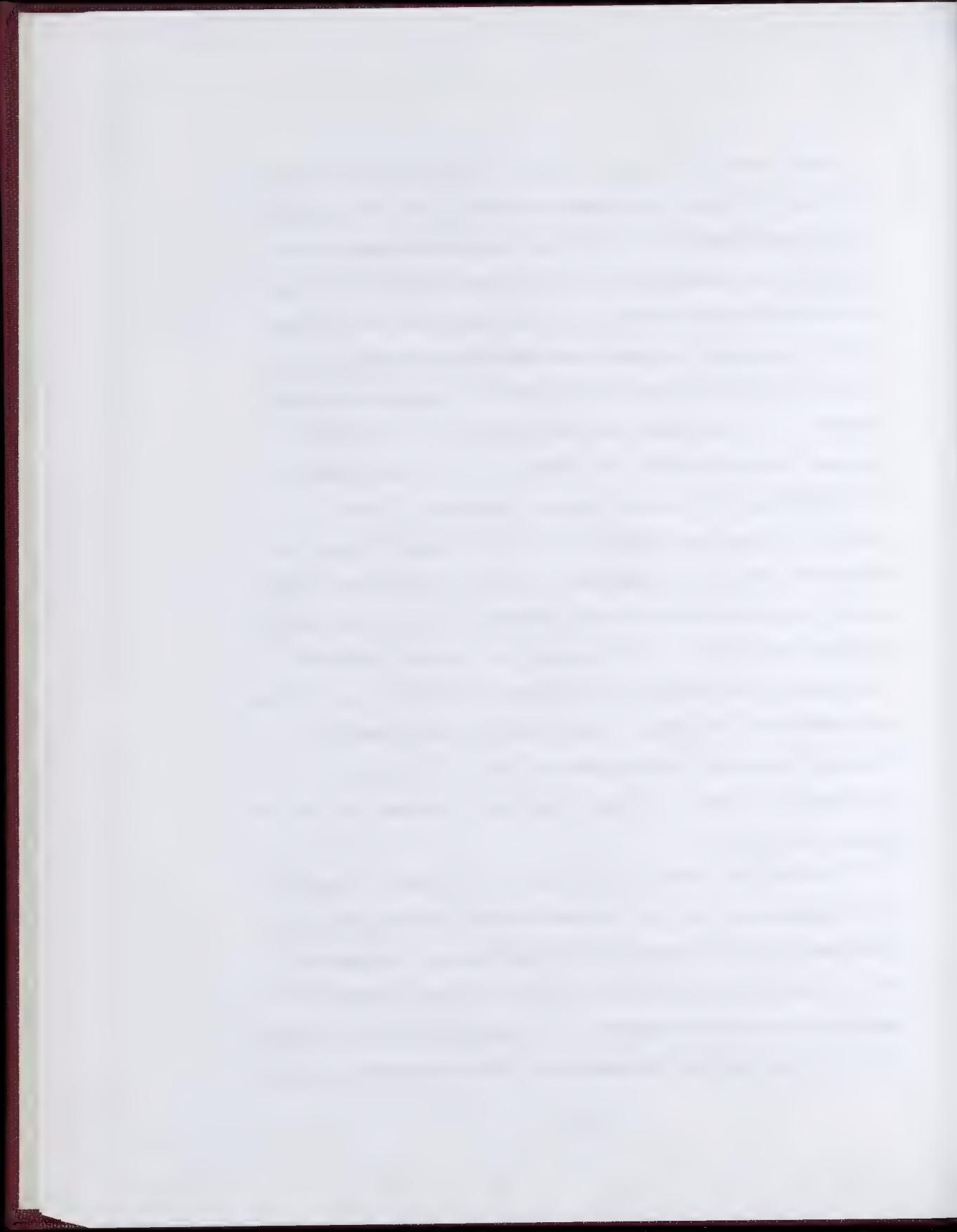
GARDNER: What was your relationship like with [Cleveland mayor] Carl [B.] Stokes?

LEE: We know each other to say hello, and he came to the opening of the new wing. He recognized the museum's educational program as being something that was an effective and useful facility. But basically we did not get terribly mixed up in political things.



The principal connection with the city was that Bill [William E.] Ward, the museum designer, and the director, myself, were members of the fine arts committee of the city planning commission. We did have regular meetings. We received no remuneration or any expenses, but we had regular meetings and sometimes almost on a weekly basis. We had a lot to do with the aesthetic and architectural aspects of things going on in Cleveland: the design of the new Justice Center, the design of the then Standard Oil Building, the public library, the new-- I mean, all kinds of things and things out in development areas that were under Title IV, whatever it was. Things were always under supervision of the city planning commission, and Joe [Joseph] McCullough, the director of the art institute [Cleveland Institute of Art] across the street, and Viktor Schreckengost, on their design faculty and a famous designer, were on that commission and also several architects in town. We had a lot to do and we got in the papers and so on.

On the plus side, I will say that I was chairman of the subcommittee of the Justice Center project that was involved with the artistic embellishment of the project. In my capacity there, I was able to convince people that we should get Isamu Noguchi to do the big sculpture Portal out in front and get Richard Hunt, the black sculptor from

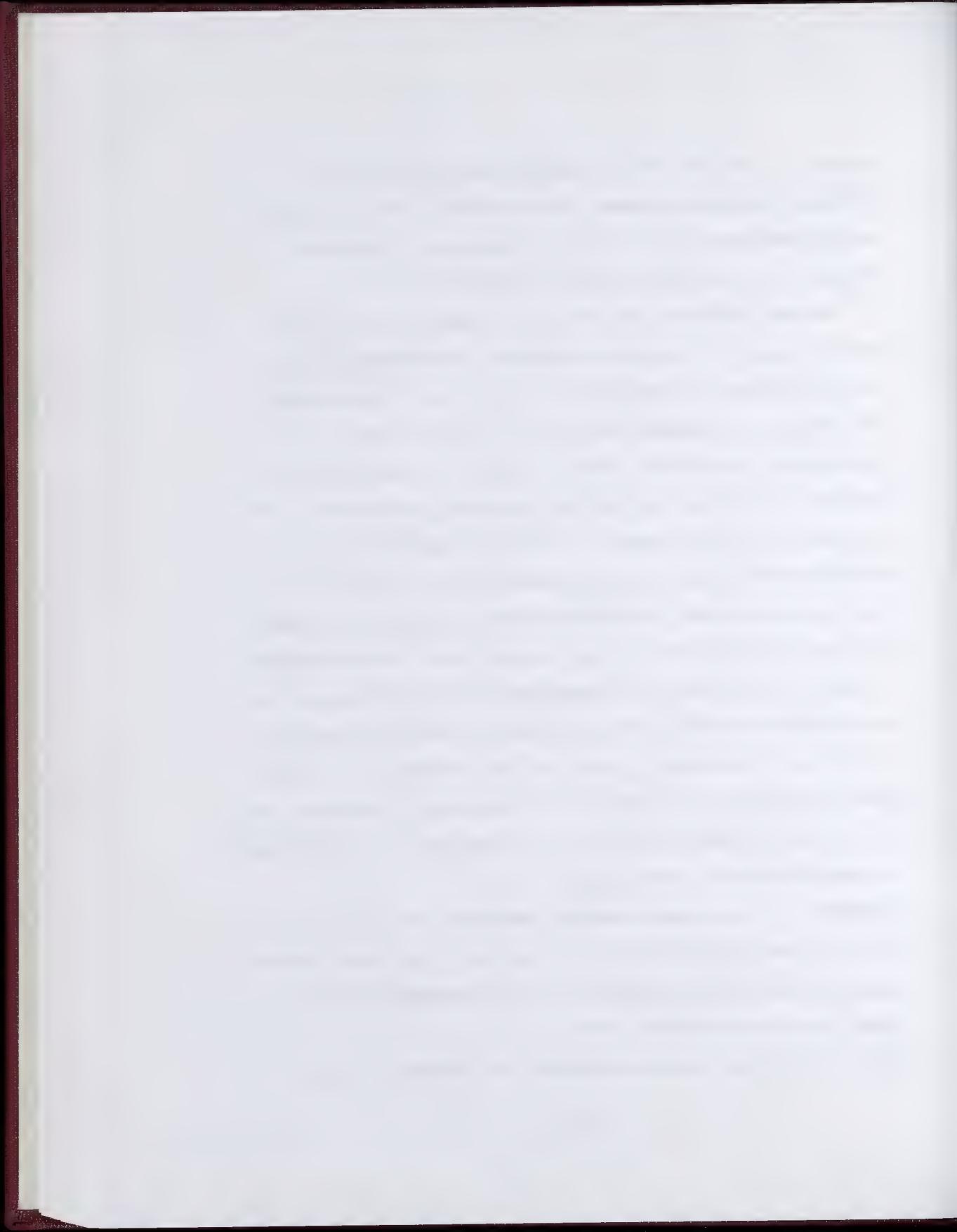


Chicago, to do the work he did in one of the other entrances and George Segal to do the sculpture for still another entrance. And we had a big mural by Richard Piarson from Oberlin [College] in the interior.

We had an impact on the city's appearance, on the revised plans for the Justice Center, which would have been a disaster if they put it up the way in which they had originally proposed to do it. So there was interaction in terms of public service by museum staff members, two of us, on the city planning commission. And that was all to the good. It kept us somewhat knowledgeable about what was going on in the city, and the city learned to deal with the aesthetic area. There was a man from the city that we met at city hall, and there was a staff in city hall that performed the operations, all of the mechanics of the committee and all the legal aspects and so on. That was, I think, a real contribution on the part of the museum to the life of the city. Certainly, it was an educational opportunity for the people from the art museum and the art institute.

GARDNER: Did you ever have any exciting controversies? I think of the [Richard] Serra sculpture in New York or the Rocky statue in Philadelphia that were entertaining for their fine arts commissioners.

LEE: Well, the Noguchi sculpture was attacked very



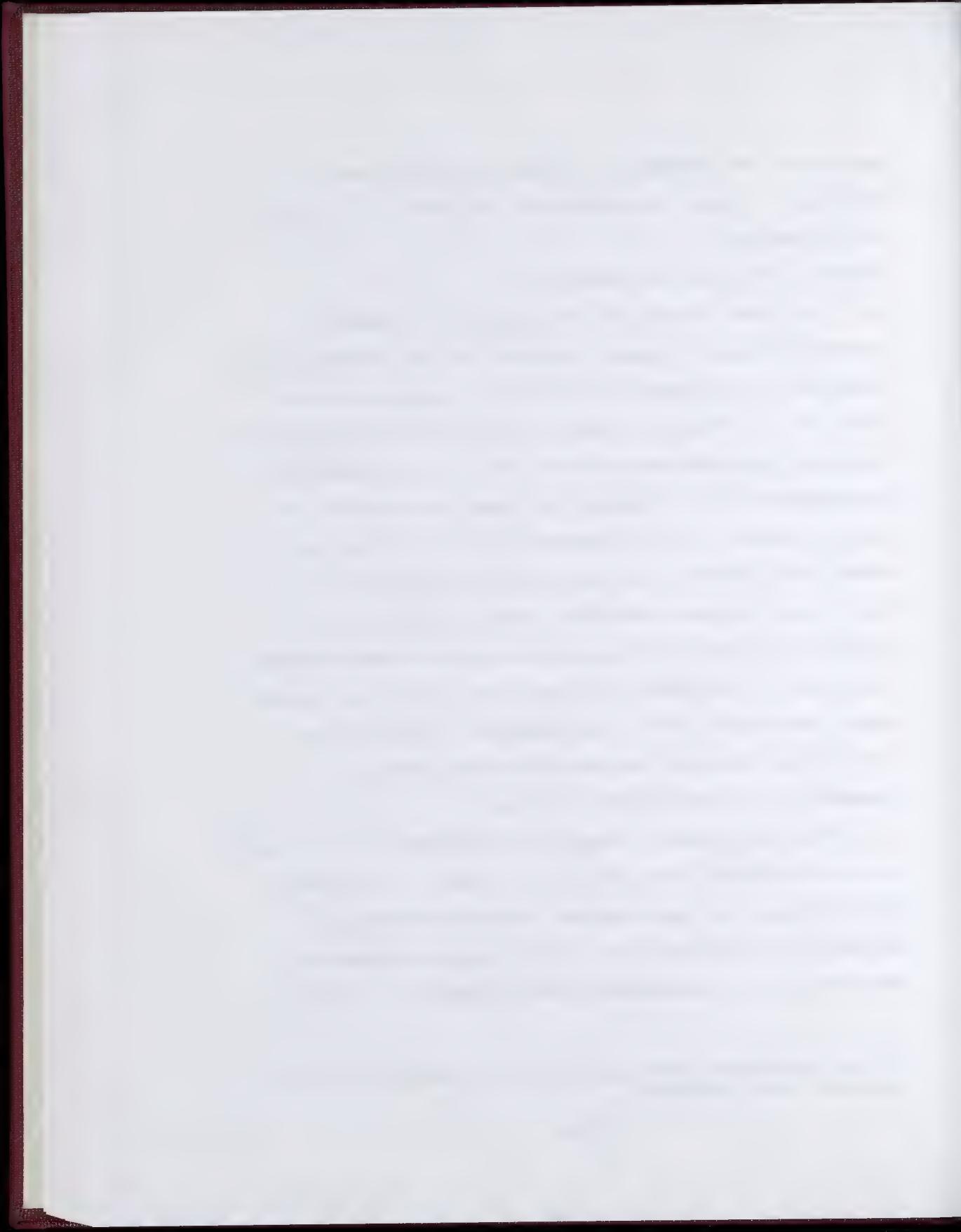
heavily in the newspapers from write-ins and even the newspaper. I mean, the usual sort of what I call the yahoo reaction.

GARDNER: What was the attack on?

LEE: Oh, first of all, it was abstract. It wasn't representational. I mean, people in the art world seem to think they're the only ones who have an opinion on the works of art. There's a whole lot of people out there who have very, very strong opinions. They're not necessarily knowledgeable on the subject, but they have a right to their opinions. And they expressed it in no uncertain terms. They didn't like that Noguchi sculpture. They didn't like the Hunt sculpture. We were involved in getting a big Tony Smith sculpture outside a new building, right next to the Flats. By that time, things had quieted down. The Noguchi came to be accepted. This was ten years later, the year the Tony Smith sculpture was accepted, so it was no great problem.

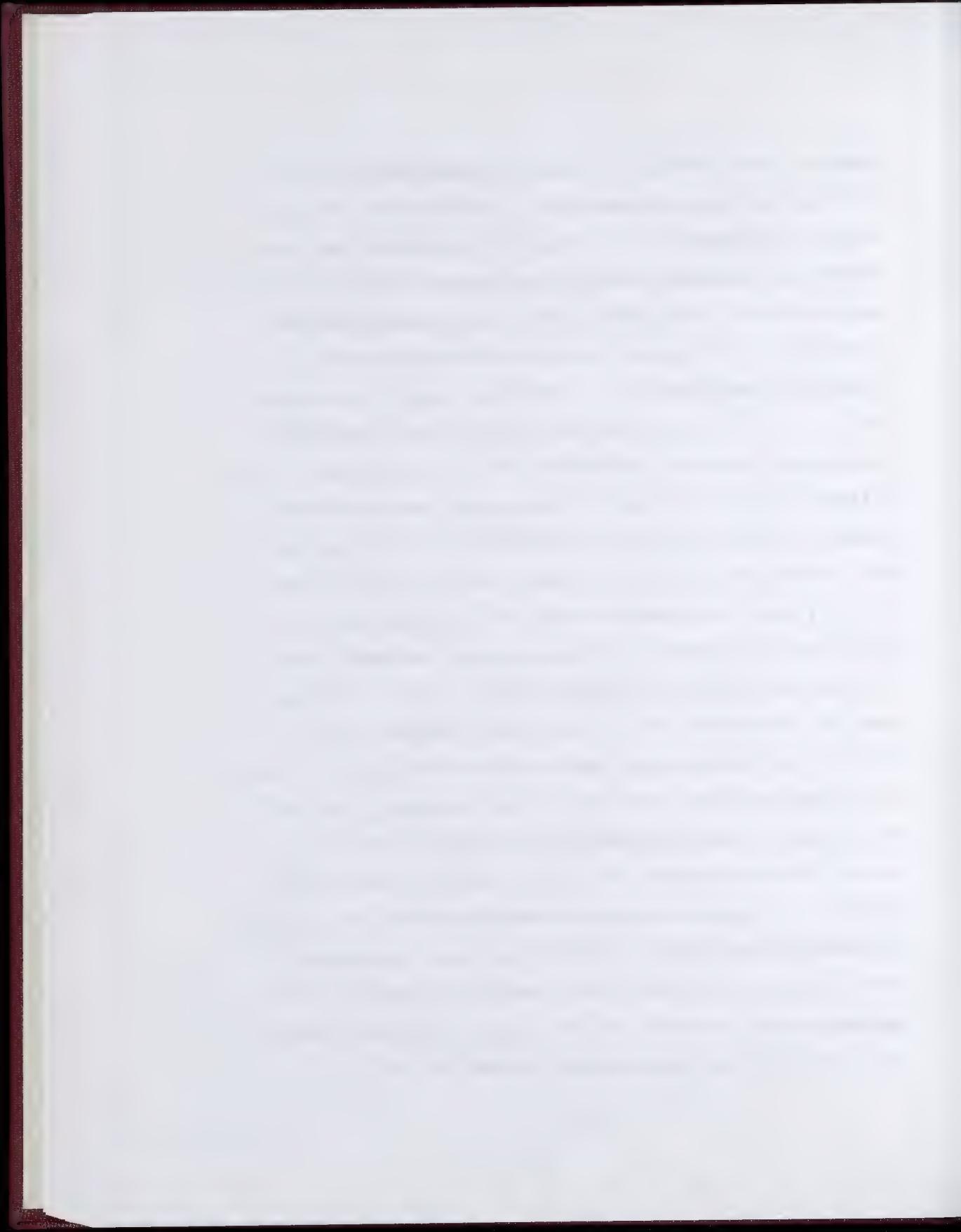
There were another couple of structures over near the city hall--a park just aside the city hall. There was a big sculpture that was supposed to go up outside the Standard Oil Building, *[for which I was an adviser to Standard Oil. I recommended Claes Oldenburg to them.

* Lee added the following bracketed section during his review of the transcript.



Oldenburg did a design I thought was very good and the money was in hand and everything. Then British Petroleum bought out Standard Oil.] They had a president who felt he had some knowledge and had very strong opinions on the subject of art. They didn't like the Oldenburg and they canned it. For a while, it was put in a storehouse.

Oldenburg threatened to sue. The last word-- I have not seen it, but I think a few months ago it was installed at the side of city hall, with the artist's cooperation, in a different stance. I think it was a big, vertical rubber stamp. It was to go with the Standard Oil Building, as you look at the main facade, just here to one side. At the city hall, it's been put in, but it's been put in I think semi-lying down, something rather like that. But it's now out and it's in public view. I would say that some of these major public sculptures downtown, also outside the National City Bank-- Joe McCullough and I were on a committee that aided and advised the bank. We got them to get a George Rickey mobile sculpture out at a corner at Ninth and Euclid. So we had an impact on the downtown in terms of sculptural embellishment and in terms of architectural design, and that was good. Of course, back in the earlier days, when Tommy Munro and the school systems worked together, we had a very close relationship with the Cleveland public school system and the



educational department, the extension exhibitions department. But with the drying up of the public funds in the schools for art and reduction and concentration of the curriculum, that became increasingly difficult. I forgot to mention--and I think it's still in operation--the extension exhibitions department opened a gallery on the west side at the-- I've forgotten the name of the high school there, but a substantial room.

GARDNER: Lakewood High School.

LEE: Lakewood High School. It was a gallery four times the size of this room here, I would think. And it was an important gesture to the west side, which had been ignored by a great many people for a long time. But I don't think that there's much profit to be gained from close connections between politics of city government and the running of private art museums.

GARDNER: Did you get any money from the city?

LEE: No.

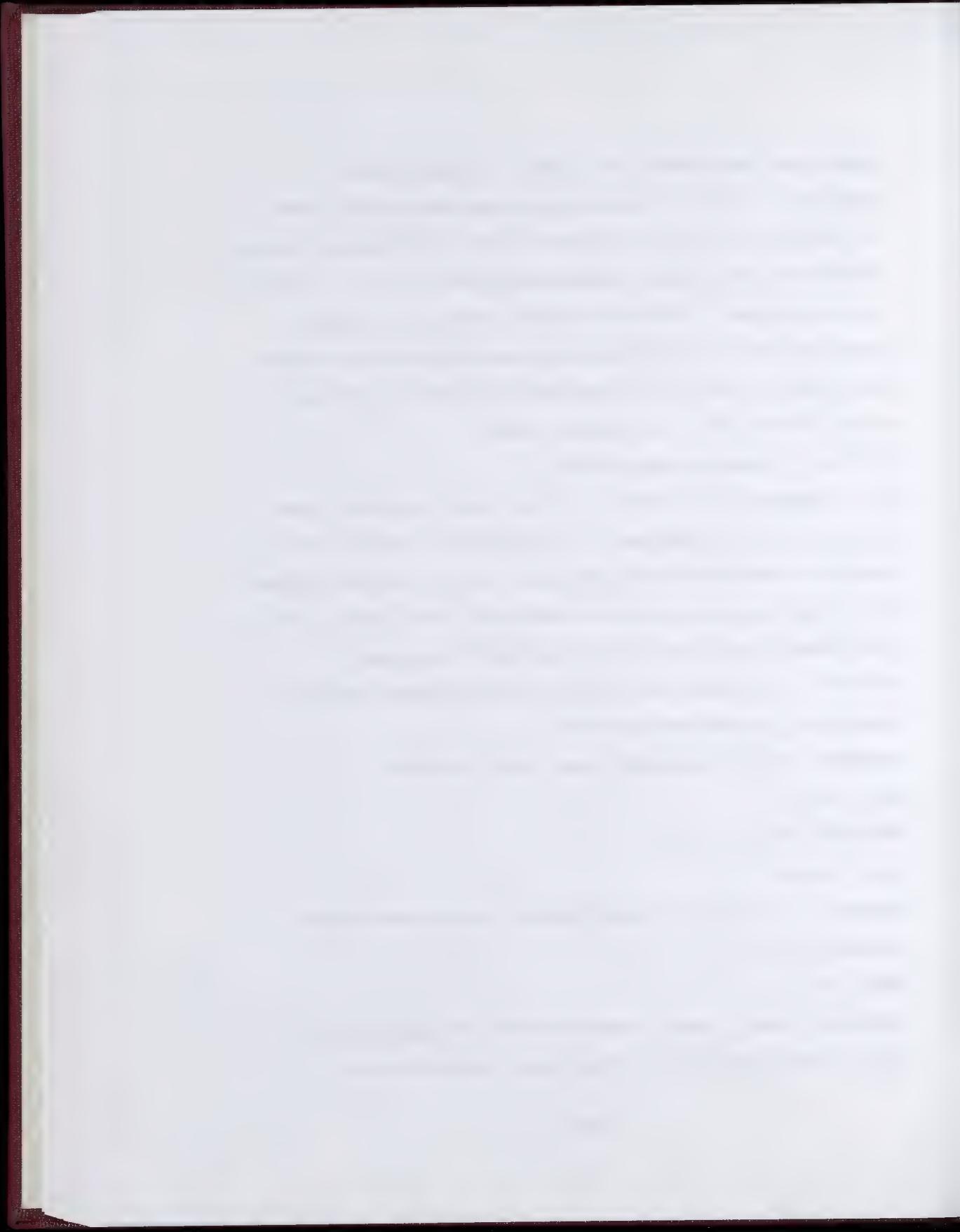
GARDNER: None at all?

LEE: None.

GARDNER: Is that maintained today? There are no city grants at all?

LEE: No.

GARDNER: That's good. That's a sort of separation of church from state that I think is a very positive--



LEE: When I was on the Ohio arts commission, from the beginning, when they first formed it-- And as you know, the federal government, the National Endowment for the Arts, gave money to all the states who had arts commissions, specifically designated for them to disburse-- this arts council, too--as they saw fit for art within the state. There was a lot of politicking and a lot of arguing and so forth about how that was to be done. But the major institutions were able to cooperate together to see that the major part of the funds went to the major institutions. That didn't mean all of it by any means. But I think it made for a wiser use of the money than in the case of those states that tend to disburse in small dribs and drabs around all over the place. But that was public money, of course, through the arts council, Ohio Arts Council. We [the Cleveland Museum of Art], like others, made applications to the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, to the Museum Services Institute for grants for specific projects and so forth, which was just as everyone else did. But the museum is a private corporation, not for profit. It has its own endowment, and it does not receive any operating income from city, state, or federal resources.

GARDNER: That's an interesting point, tying into the notion of private and also the notion of arts council and



its support for major arts institutions. In my limited experience with the arts councils, they love to give money for general operating support. In Ohio, is the situation different, so that you can apply specifically for projects to the arts council?

LEE: Each institution had its own method of getting and using these funds. We've felt unanimously--trustees and the director, administrative staff--that it was unwise to get to rely upon possibly short-term, short-lived state, federal, or city funds for operating expenses, because it comes and goes according to the whim of the legislature. Therefore, we should make a point of having this money be assigned to projects that had a definable end and which were secondary to the principal operating funds and the projects of the museum and operations of the museum. I think that was a smart way to handle it.

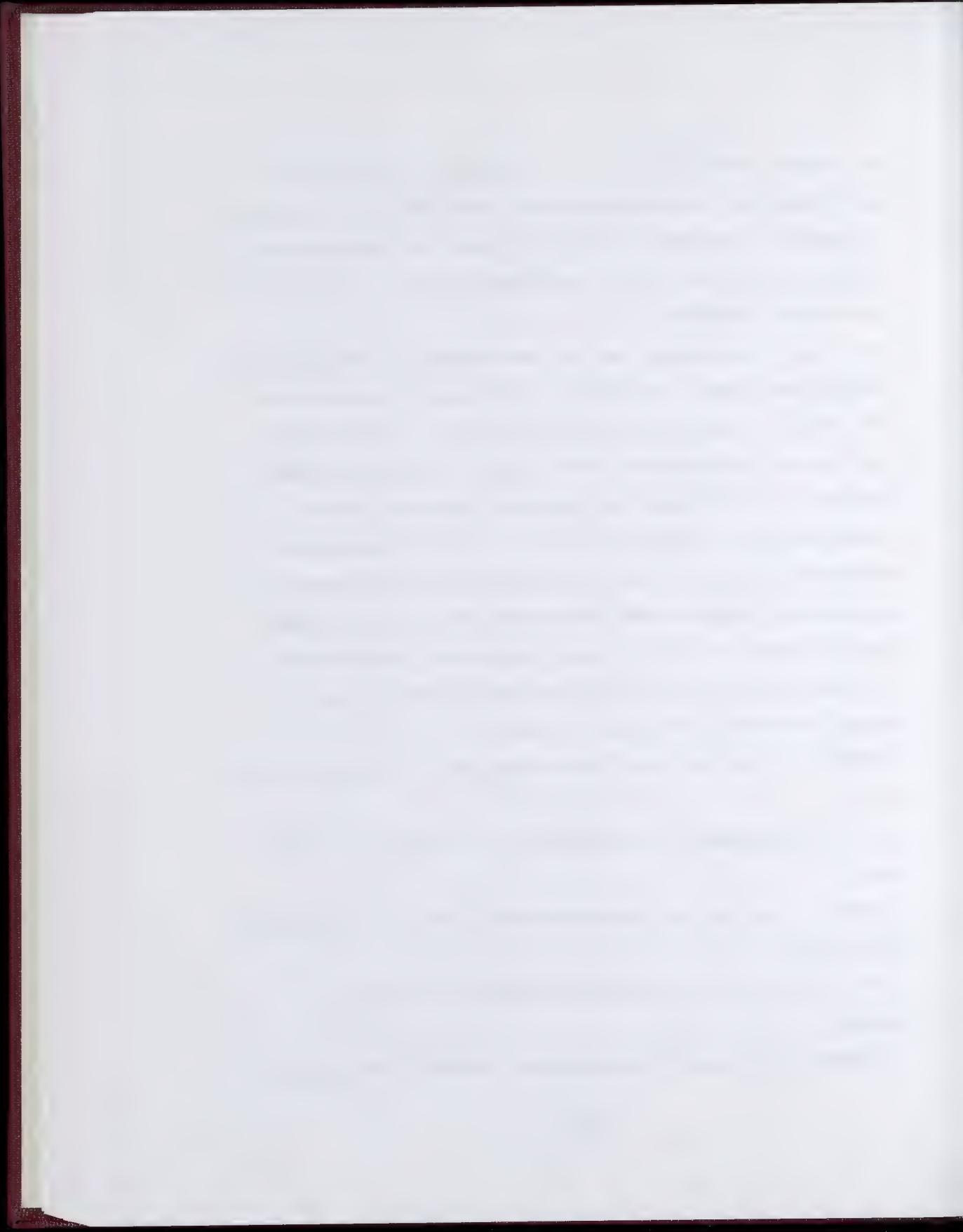
GARDNER: I bet the local orchestras didn't do it the same way.

LEE: The orchestra? No, they run their shop and we run ours.

GARDNER: You were on the arts council when it started up? You were a--

LEE: I was one of the initial members of the arts council.

GARDNER: You weren't on the panels, though, you were one



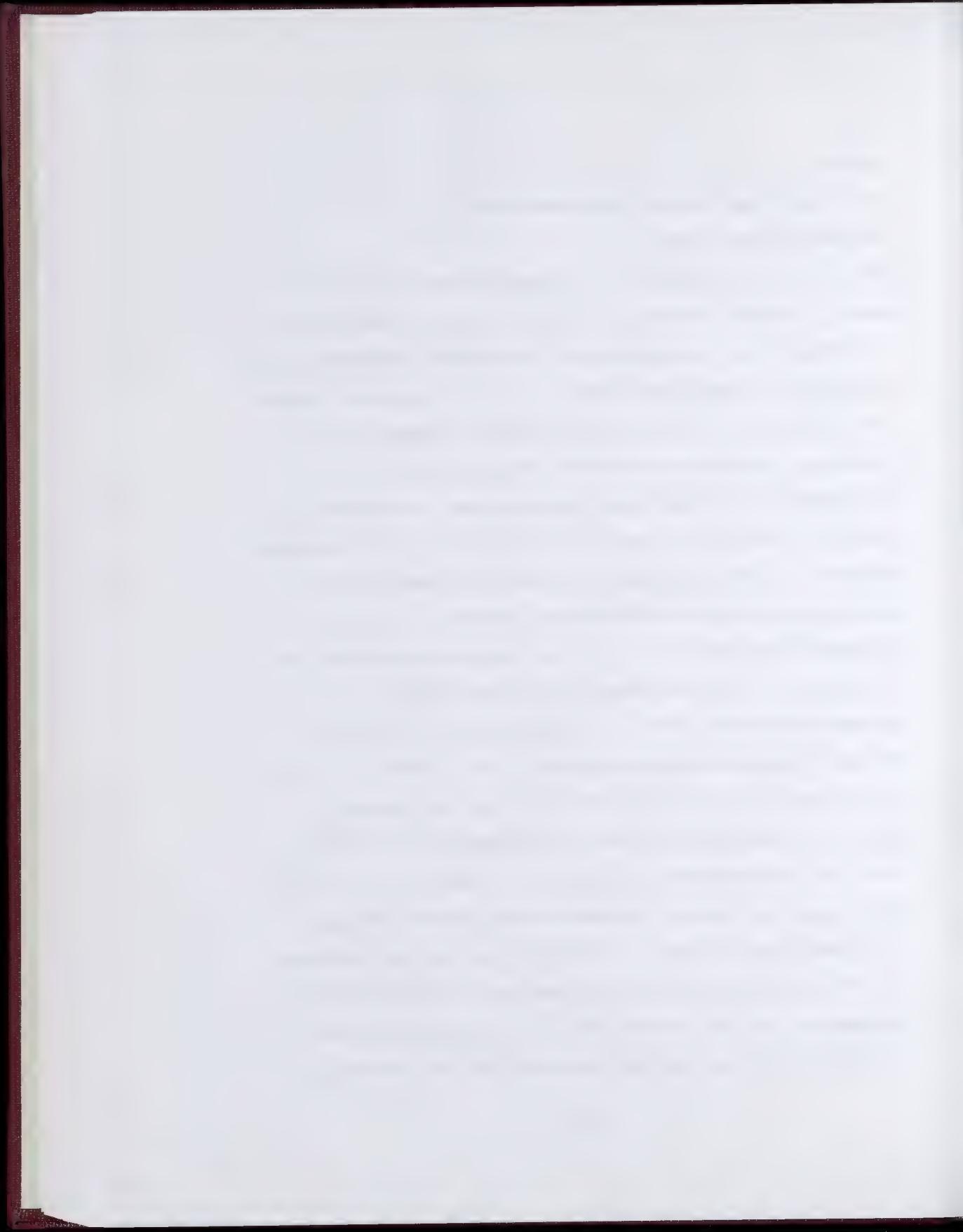
of the--

LEE: No, I was one of the councillors.

GARDNER: Councillor.

LEE: Yes. The orchestra-- We were friendly with George Szell. We knew him and his wife very well. When we had the Breuer wing under control-- The general manager of the Cleveland Orchestra was then A. Beverly Barksdale, a South Carolinian and a very efficient general manager of the orchestra, and with wide experience because of the greatness of the Cleveland Orchestra and its travels all over the place and so on. We hired him to be our general manager. I wanted somebody to take the load of general administration off the director's office. Beverly Barksdale was perfect for it, and he did a wonderful job for me on it. But we never talked much about the orchestra because-- Well, he was a singer and so forth. He and George got along very well. As a matter of fact, George was the one who recommended that he do this. Because I think Beverly was not getting along too well with the trustees of the Cleveland Orchestra, so he was very happy to come to the museum as a general manager.

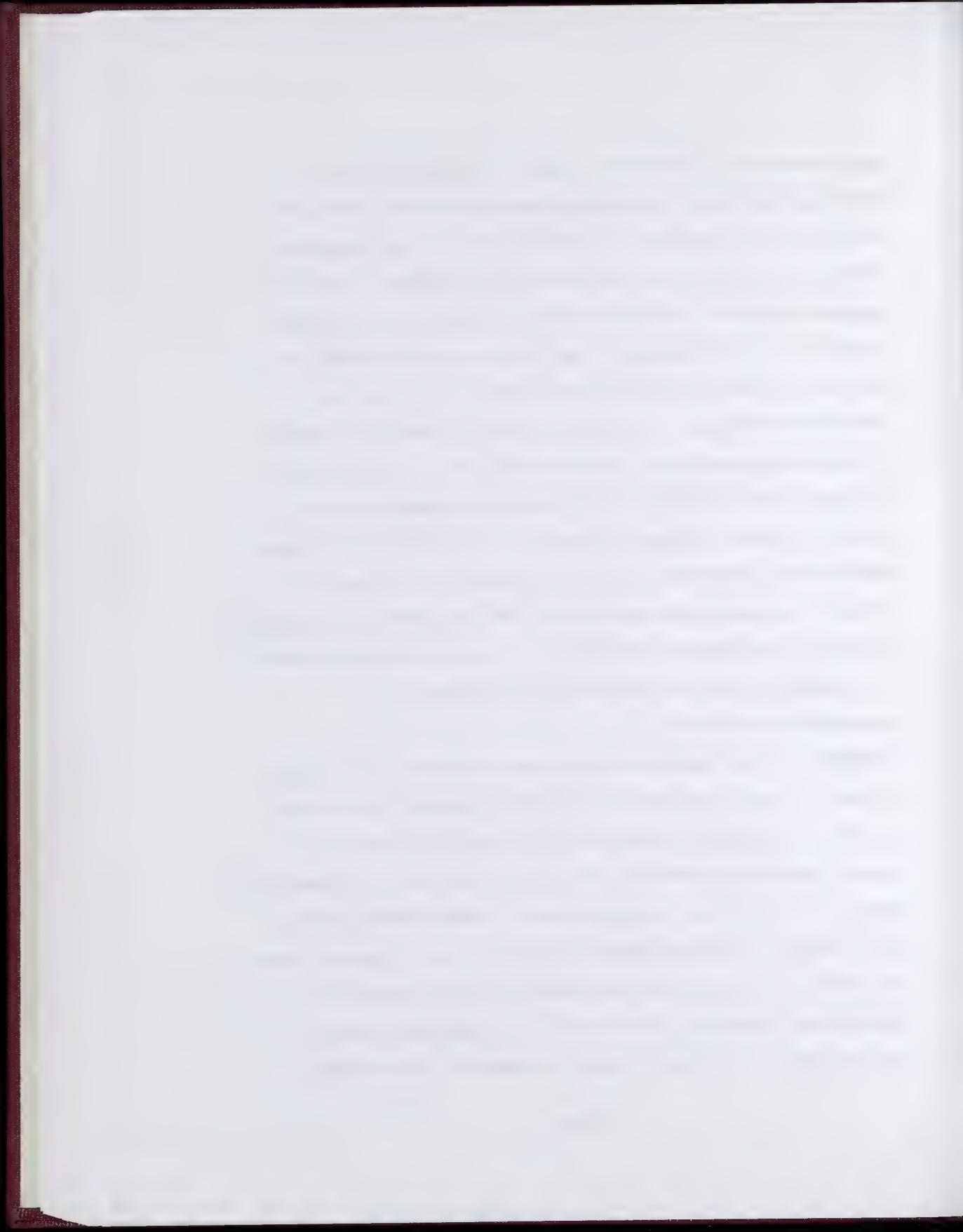
One thing we had in the museum and we kept revising it and keeping it up to date: we had a very carefully worked out but very simple chart of organization--who reported to who and so on--and this was all worked out



very carefully. Barksdale reported to the director. There was no direct reporting from the general manager's office to the trustees. I believe that in an artistic institution, just like an orchestra or theater, the general director is the one who is responsible for the style of the institution. And if it's a bad style, you get rid of him. If it's a good style, you consider yourself fortunate. And we kept that pyramidal structure. If something was wrong, the trustees knew right where to go--they would see me or the operations administrator, Albert Grossman, except in terms of pure finance matters. The finance committee had direct access, of course, to Albert. He was their secretary. But in terms of anything involving the general policies of the museum and so forth, the director was the one where the ultimate responsibilities went.

GARDNER: A big year for the museum was 1971, in a couple of ways. The first one is that the [Marcel] Breuer wing opened. You talked about that as developing over the years, because you really had it in mind from the time you took over. But you've never really talked about Breuer.

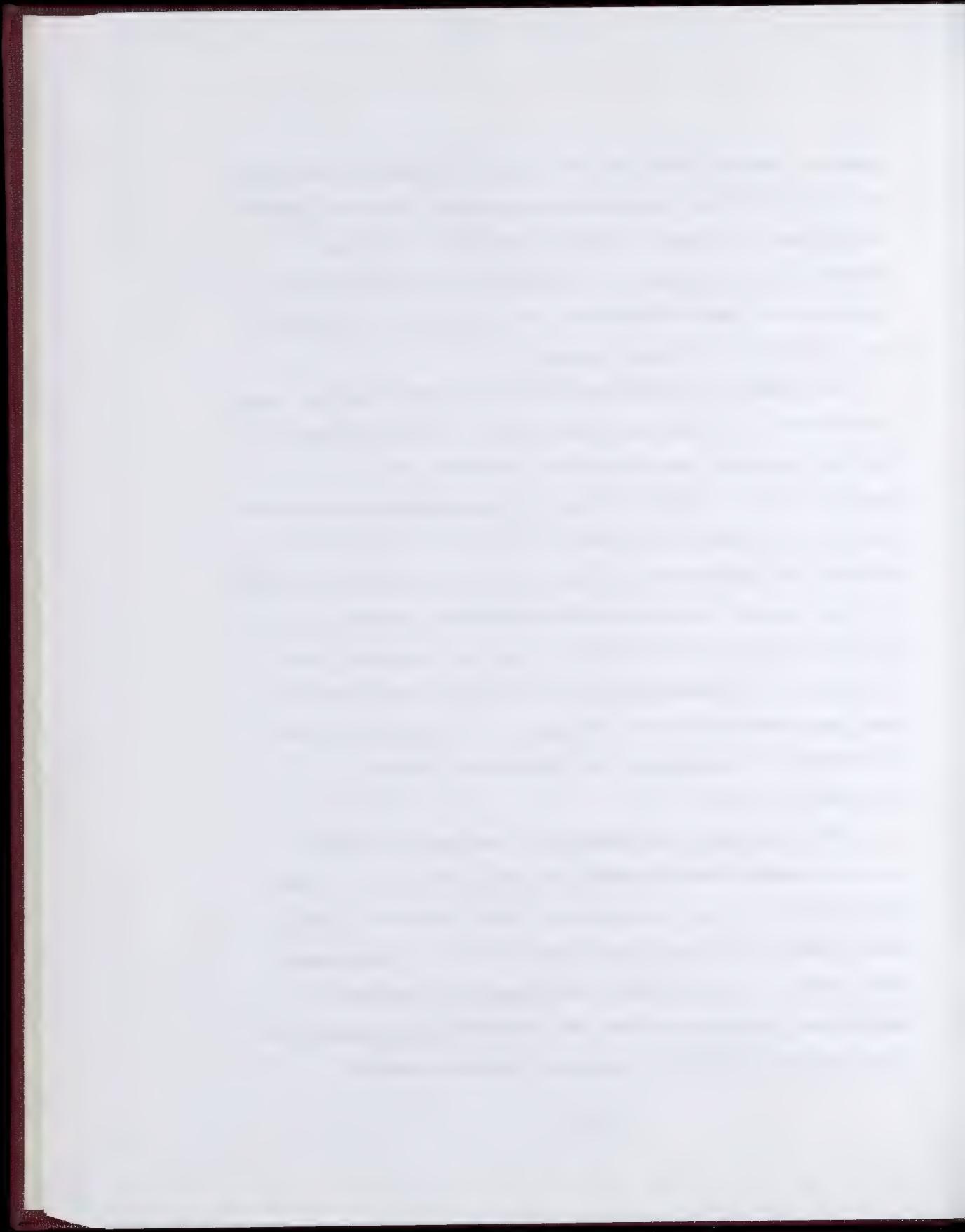
LEE: Well, I told you Emery May Norweb and I agreed that-- We went to New York and we looked around at some of the stuff that [John G.] Dinkeloo's firm had been doing up at the Met, we looked at the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim



[Museum], and we looked at the Whitney [Museum of American Art]. And we liked the Whitney very much. We both agreed that it was fruitless to try to shop around and hold competitions and to get all the newspapers and everybody into the act. Who's winning? Who's on first base? Etc., etc. We said, "Let's get Breuer."

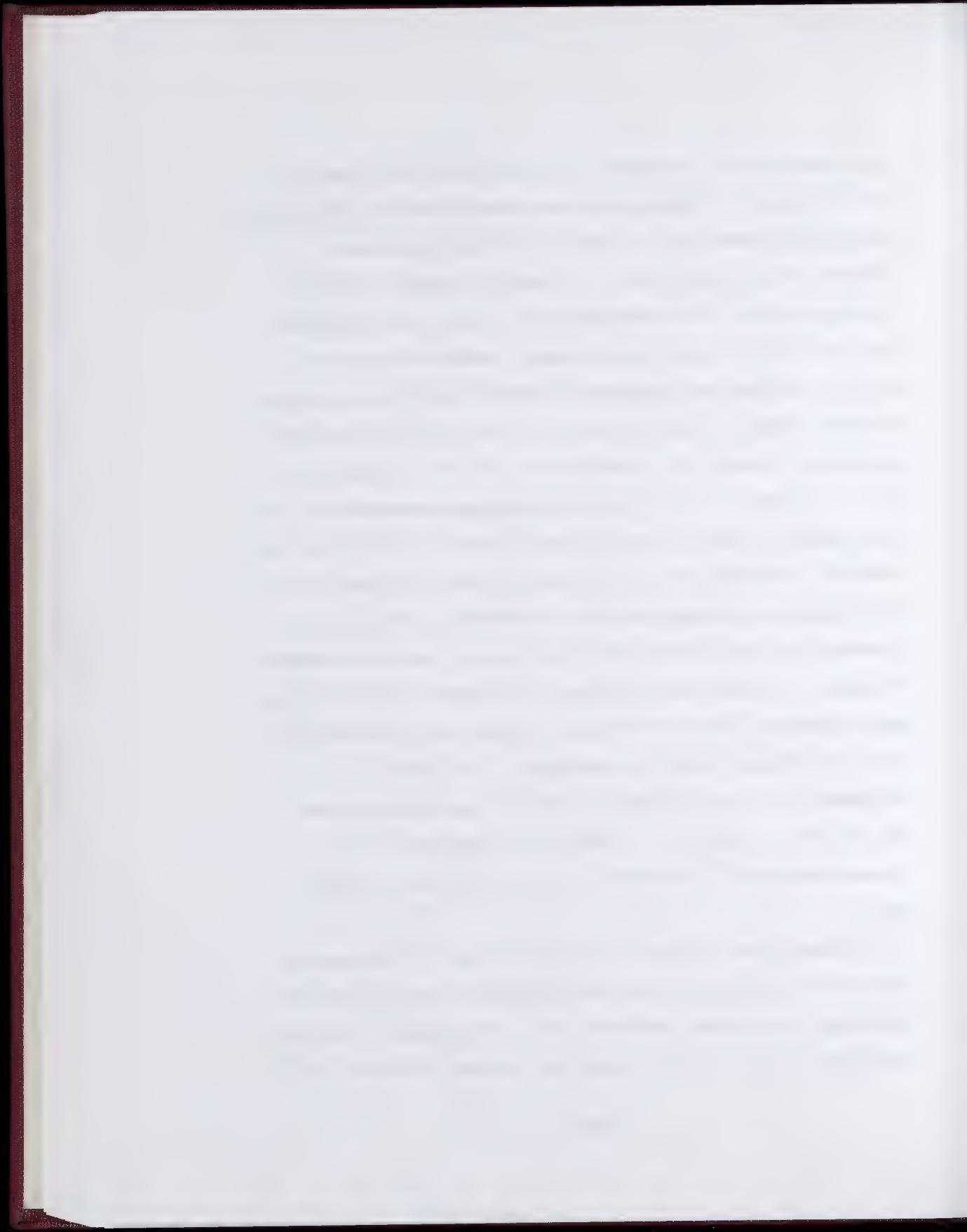
We worked with Hamilton Smith as a team together, and Breuer came out. He had a weak heart, but he was very much in charge of the operation. Hamilton Smith was his deputy. And he listened to us. We had developed with the staff a very carefully worked out and quite detailed program for spaces that we needed and where we needed them and how to make this continuity of gallery structure so we could organize the collections properly. All this was worked out. The auditorium, the new music department knew what they wanted in terms of capacity and acoustics, etc. The education department-- We really had a plan. Everybody believed in it.

Once that plan was worked out, we then had-- See, I was the museum liaison person for the 1958 wing. I was appointed to do that specifically and I learned a lot. I learned why one doesn't have a cost-plus contract, among other things. Once we had this program all worked out in detail and so forth--it had been reviewed and checked--we then removed that from discussion by anyone except



department heads. Anybody under the department head--no further report. They could have some wonderful ideas that they forgot about and so forth, but they were dead. Period. That's what cost a 50 percent overrun on the first building. But the department heads came together, and once Breuer came out and spent weeks working with us on it. And he then prepared a design phase which we were free to accept or reject. We paid him for that, but we could say, "Sorry, it doesn't work. We don't want to do it." We liked it. And he made some good suggestions. We went back, in some cases, to people that were involved to see if-- But once we had the design phase accepted, then even department heads were cut out of the picture. The director and the operations administrator and the general manager, we three were the ones. If there's anything that had to happen, it had to happen through us in connection with the liaison with the architect. So there was no business of a curator running off to the architect and saying, "Oh, I forgot. We've got to have this wall changed and put it over here." You know, that kind of thing.

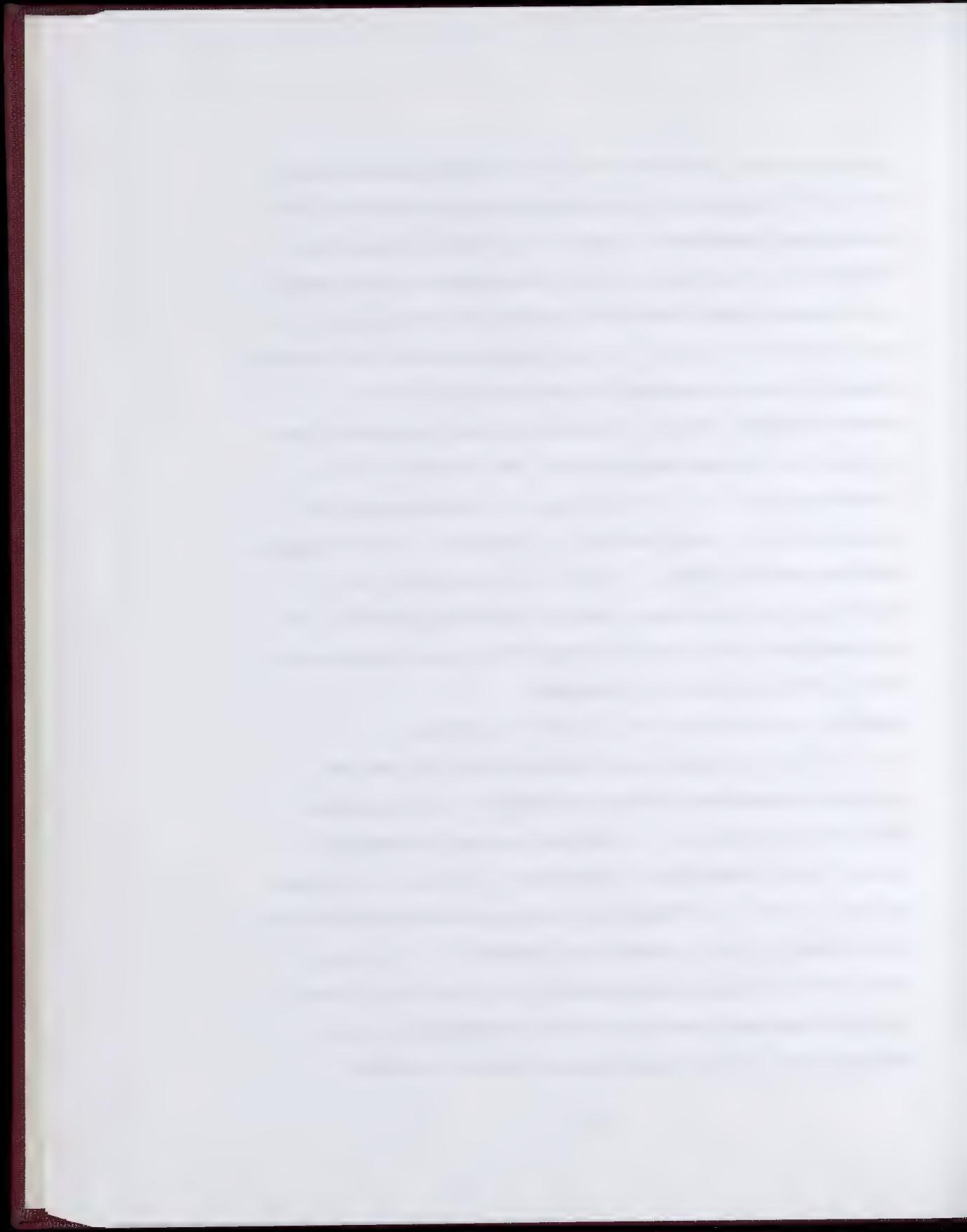
Breuer came up with some fine ideas for the special exhibition area which-- We had a flexible one in the 1958 building, but it was the first one. We learned a lot and he helped us a lot on it, and the new one, I think, was



just marvelous. He gave us a ten-thousand-square-foot area with no columns. In order to do that and have the educational department above the galleries, he put in--with one of these huge military helicopters--this amazing big stressed-steel beam that spanned the whole area. On the first floor we told him we wanted a lobby that was big enough to have receptions and we wanted it to be indestructible, because whenever alcohol is served, there is bound to be some destruction. We wanted it to be indestructible. No works of art in it--beautiful but indestructible. Boy, he did it. Granite. A very simple, massive granite floor. I mean, it's perfect. The auditorium is beautiful. We had to tinker with it. It was designed with curtains behind the slatted walls--all wood. Have you seen it in person?

GARDNER: In person? No. I will in October.

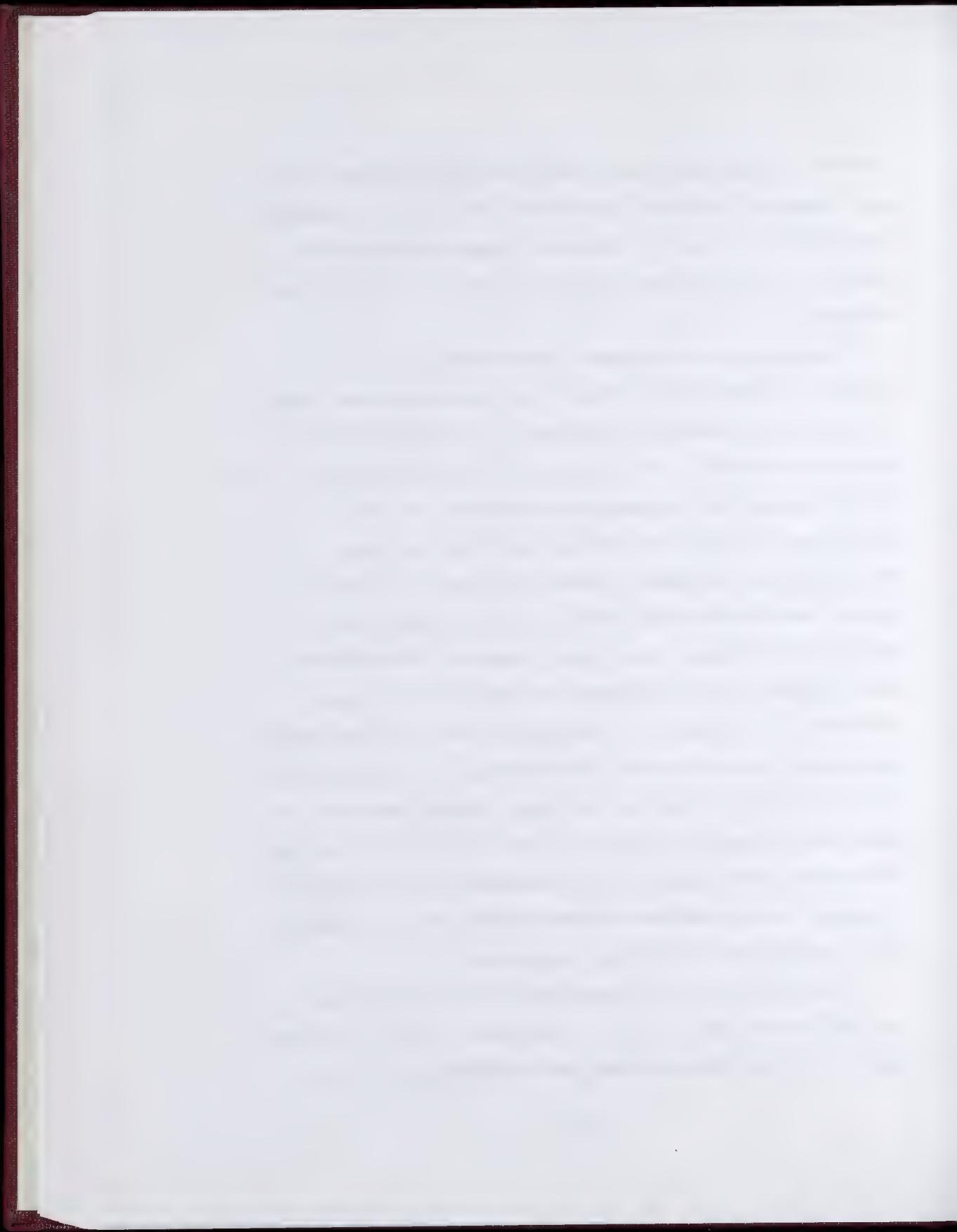
LEE: We had to tinker with that in order to get the requisite acoustical things to satisfy Karel Paukert. He's Czechoslovakian. He became the next curator of music. Very, very good. Excellent. He was from Prague. He had to work with Breuer on fiddling with the acoustics until they got it to where they wanted it. It meant, among other things, taking carpet off the floor. Same thing George Szell had to do over in Severance Hall, because most of the really good, I think, musical



directors these days want sound that is not mushy or they don't want it to sound like the old New York Philharmonic soupy kind of a sound. They want some brightness and clarity. But it worked very well, and I think it's very handsome.

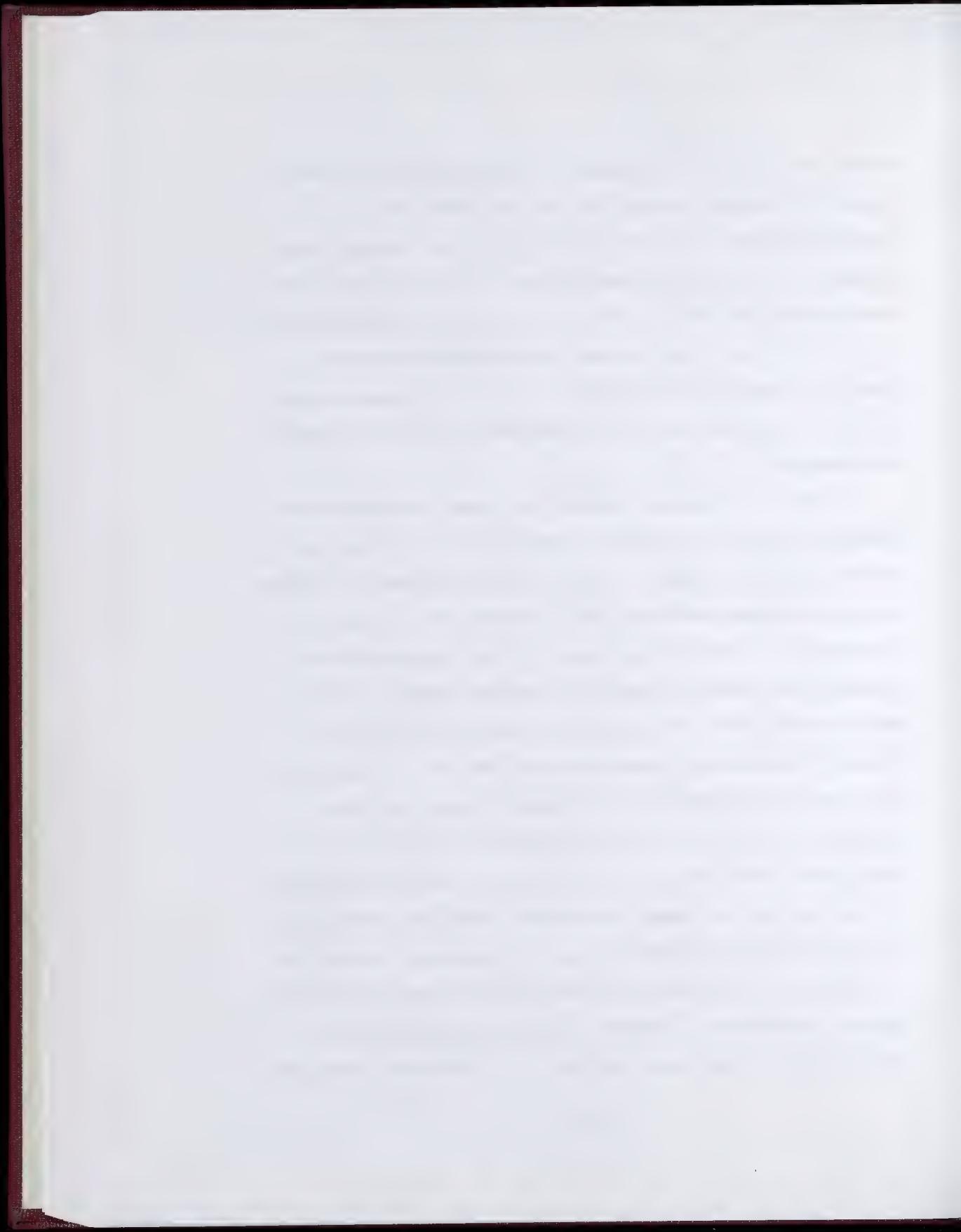
The education department got a proper suite of offices. There were, I think, twenty-six offices. Well, we have a big education department. We've always had about the biggest in the country of any major museum. The special exhibition gallery was a triumph and the staircase. I think the striped exterior was very distinguished, and people have lately been telling me this. They hated it at first, just like the Noguchi sculpture downtown. They didn't like it. But we were able, thanks to Mrs. [Mildred] Putnam and the Putnam Foundation-- She paid for the Noguchi set of three granite sculptures that marked the north entrance. And I think the whole approach was so terrific. Breuer had been to Japan many times. He knew what the feeling was. He was interested particularly in the Japanese use of stone, and it shows in the interior of the museum and the exterior too. The stonework is very, very good.

Just to give you an idea, the 1916 building was 110,000 square feet. I don't know what it cost, but that was 1916. The 1958 building was 110,000 square feet,



double the size of the museum. That building in 1958, before it was all through on the cost-plus contract, cost over \$9 million. In 1958, that's a lot of money. The Breuer wing is 110,000 square feet--it triples now. That was finished in 1971. And it came in at a fixed price at just \$6 million. So, you see, great architecture by a great architect is not necessarily all that expensive if you work with him and if you also don't let the contractor take charge.

After we finished, we had the Turner [Construction] Company come in and do the Breuer building. They had worked with him before. When we were finished, the Turner Company claimed that they had lost over \$1 million on this fixed-priced contract and blamed it on the architects because they hadn't given them complete specifications. Bob [Robert] Gale--who was one of the trustees and a friend of mine--and I were assigned the job of negotiating with the Turner Company so we wouldn't get into any lawsuits and so forth. And we literally spent time on this almost daily for six weeks, over a period of maybe six months and six weeks of working time. We really had the battle out, and when it was all finished, Turner had to swallow it, because they really didn't have any legal ground to stand on. Because they knew what they were getting into. They said--we had it in writing--that they



knew exactly what they were getting into when they accepted the fixed-price contract. So the fixed price is what they got.

GARDNER: A contract is a contract.

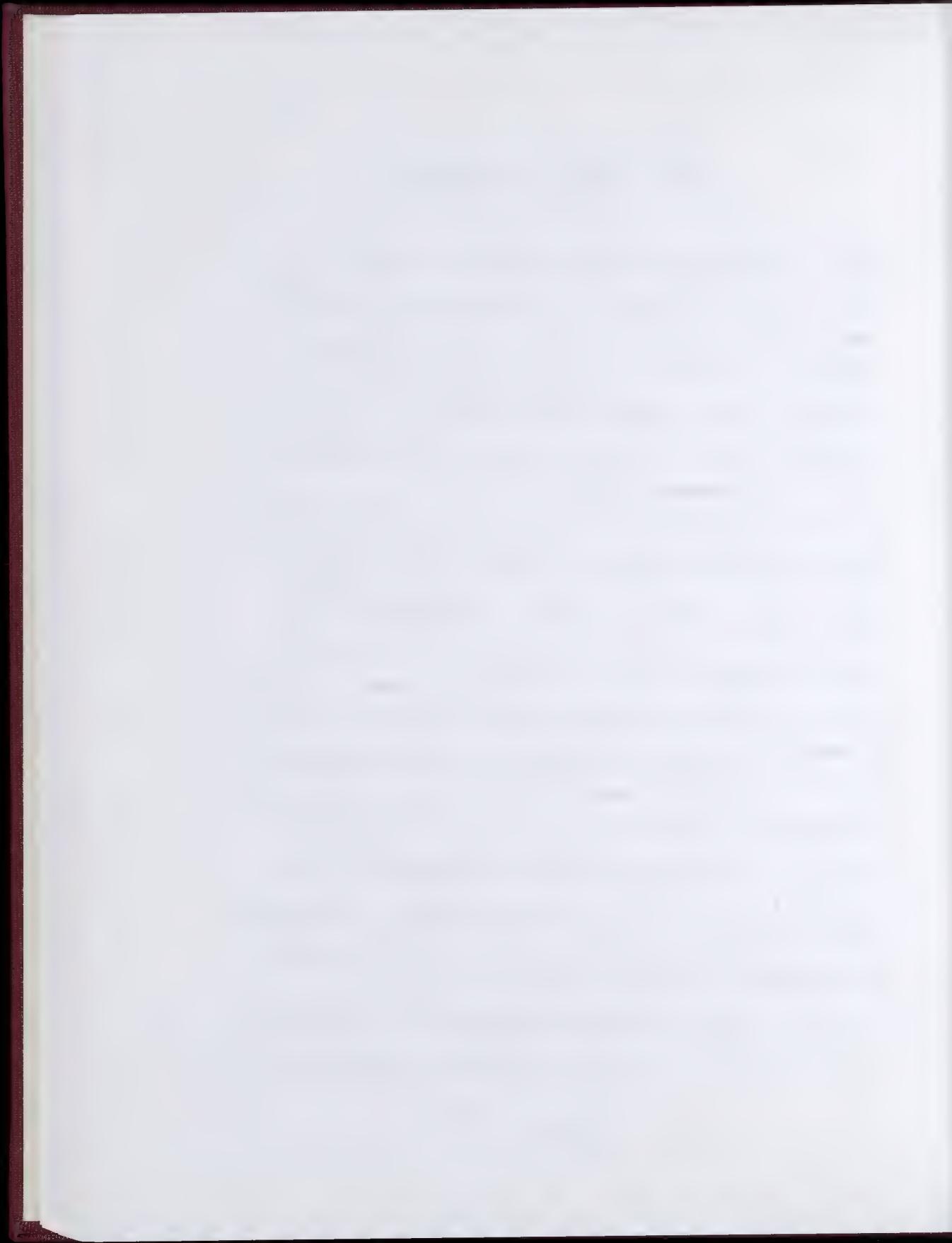
LEE: And I told Herb [Herbert D.] Conant, who was the Turner Company manager on the job, later the president of Turner, I think-- I said, "You could look upon that as a wonderful contribution to a wonderful institution." I thought he was going to kill me. [laughter]



TAPE NUMBER: X, SIDE ONE

JULY 14, 1992

LEE: Let me say one more word about the [Marcel] Breuer wing. One of the things that we specified and they put into this thing, to show that we're not by any means unaware of or opposed to more up-to-date educational devices-- We have three audiovisual rooms built in the core part, next to the educational gallery on the ground floor on the basement level: one to hold a family group of three to six people, one to hold a sort of small class group of a dozen or fifteen, and one to hold a larger class group or a group of some, I think, twenty-five to thirty people, with a built-in projection core with a reverse projection. So an individual or a small family or a class could come to the educational department and ask for specific subjects: an educational tape, audiovisual tape, on subjects like German baroque art or modern art or introduction to abstract painting. We had literally hundreds of different tapes that were developed by the educational department over a period of years. These were used a great deal and we felt much more comfortable with that arrangement. Because it meant that people got a touch of let's say technology and education in the visual arts, but it was put in a situation where that's where it



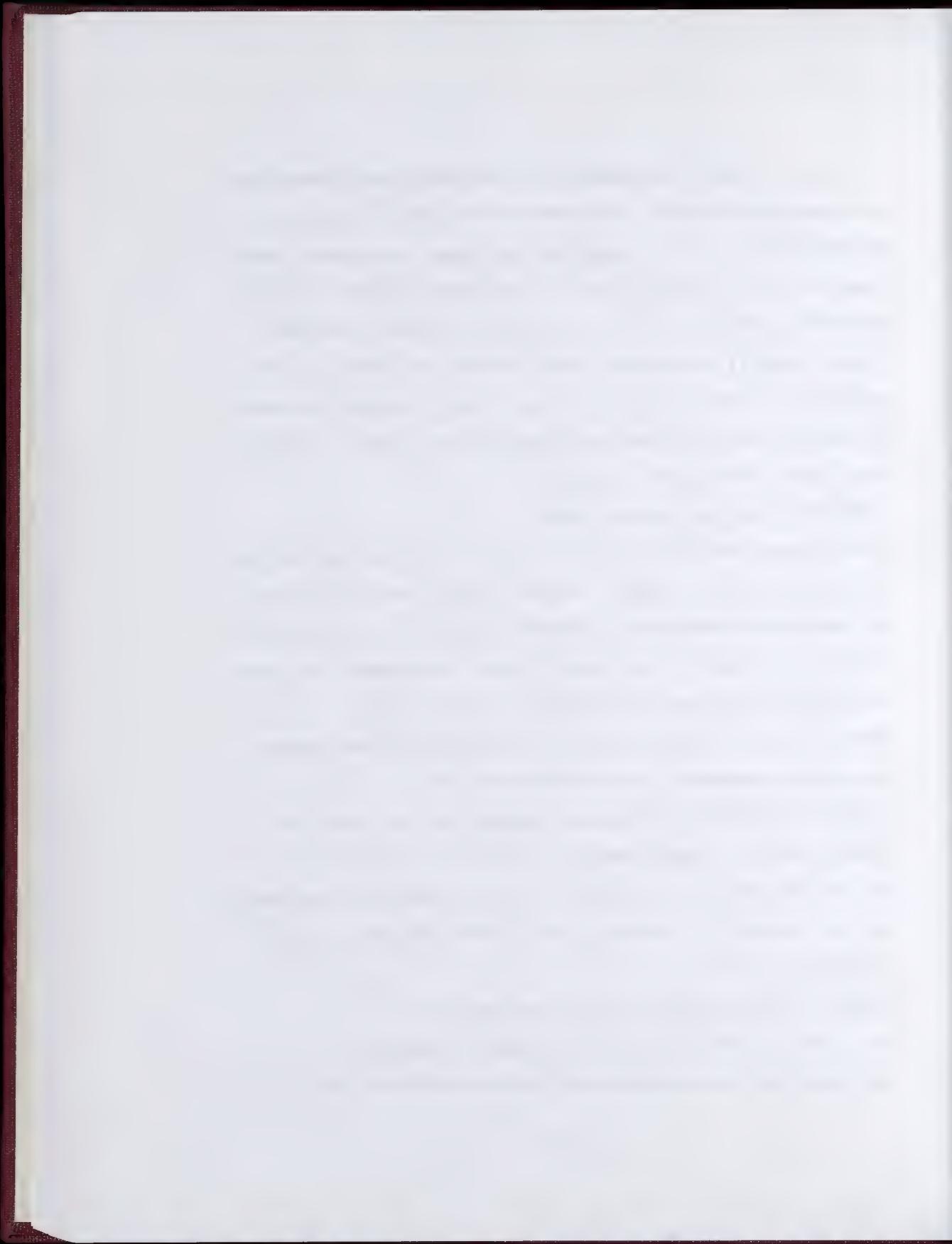
was and it didn't interfere with the galleries themselves and the works of art. You didn't have people running around like a herd of lemmings with their earpieces, where they're told, "Now, go over to the other picture over here and we'll talk about this one," and everybody goes over there. And if you happen to be looking at that picture and they're coming, you're going to get trampled to death. We solved that by these audiovisual rooms, and I think they were a very good solution.

GARDNER: What was Breuer like?

LEE: Breuer was stolid and he was-- No, he was solid. He was fairly short, stocky. He had a very, very nice sort of very gentle smile and a gentle voice and he had rather sparkly, I thought, very alert, small blue eyes. He just was a total pro and also clearly a man of great sensitivity who had looked at things and had been around the modern movement from the earliest times on, but was flexible enough and interested enough so that when he finally went to Japan toward the end of his life, before he did the Cleveland building, he went there and learned a lot and loved it. We had a very, very good relationship with him, you know.

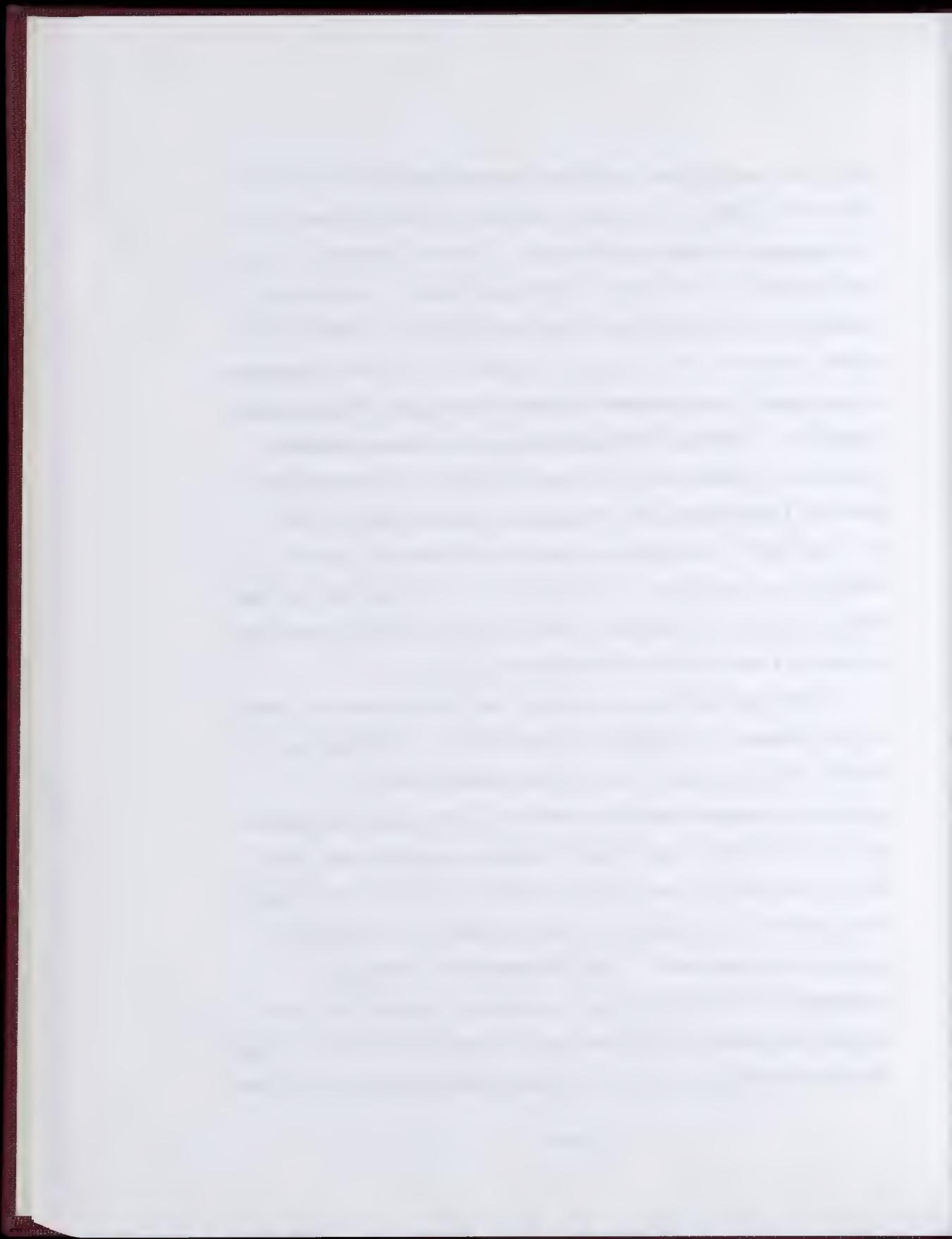
GARDNER: Anything else about the building?

LEE: Well, I think we used the special exhibition galleries for various kinds of exhibitions from '71 on.

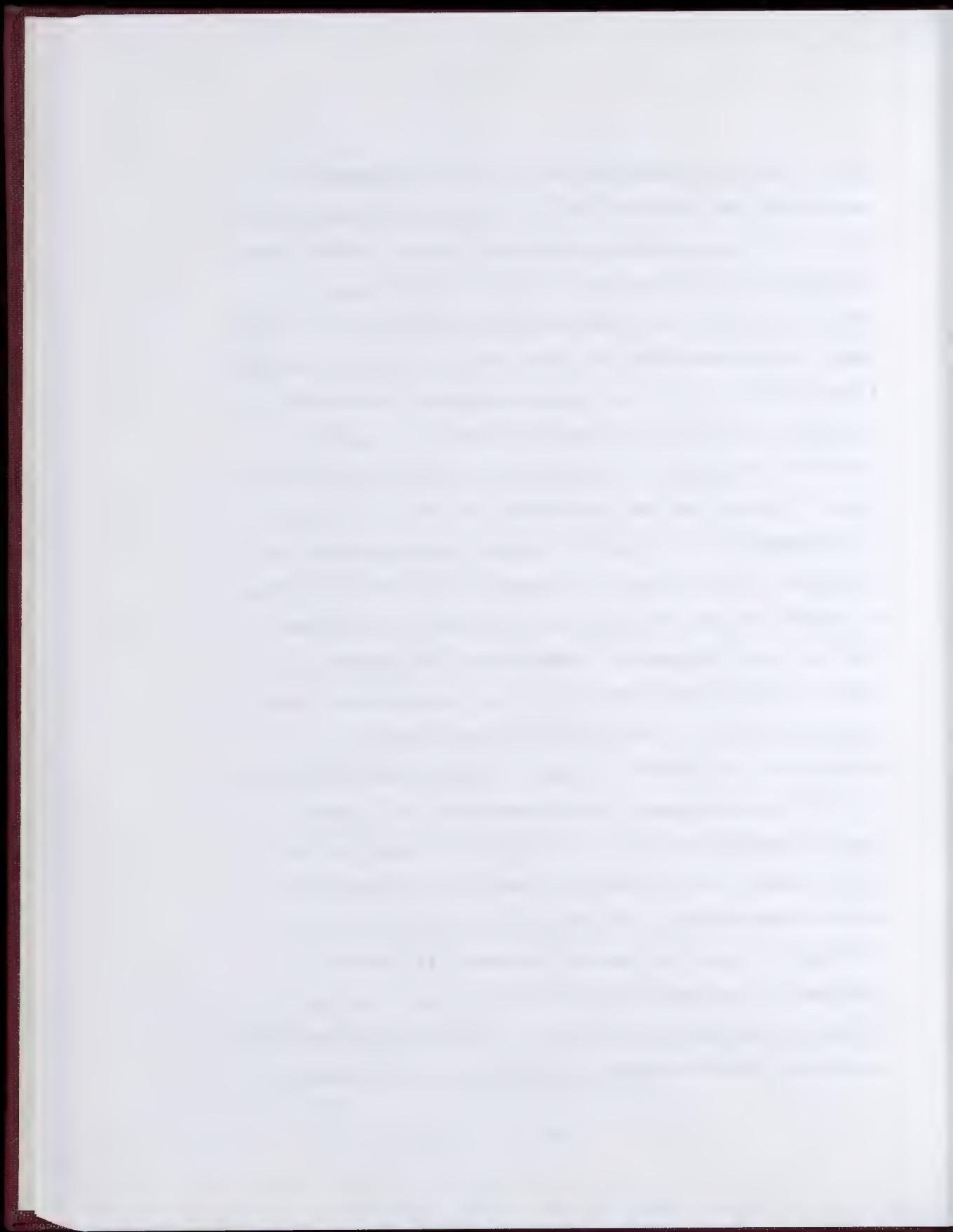


The first exhibition, the first major exhibition, that was in the new special exhibition gallery in the Breuer wing was Caravaggio and his Followers. Then an exhibition that Ted [Edmund P.] Pillsbury and Henry Hawley I think did, Dutch Art and Life in the Seventeenth Century, which was drawn from our own collection largely. And then Japonisme, Johann Liss, The European Vision of America, Afro-American Tradition, Chardin, Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting, The Realist Tradition [in French Painting], Reflections of Reality in Japanese Art, Bernardo Cavallino of Naples. Now, you can't imagine any more varied menu of special exhibitions than that. They could be accommodated in that special exhibition gallery, and Bill [William E.] Ward was intimately part of the development of that.

I can perhaps best give you the idea of what it meant to the museum-- We had a big exhibition, which was not listed here because it was not an exhibition we originated, which came from Korea: 5,000 Years of Korean Art, a very major and a very beautiful exhibition. Bill Ward installed it and it was terrific. We were the last stop on that exhibition; it was supposed to go back to Korea from Cleveland. I got a phone call from the designer at the Smithsonian Institution saying that the Korean government had given them an extension in time when they were going to be able to have the exhibition. It was



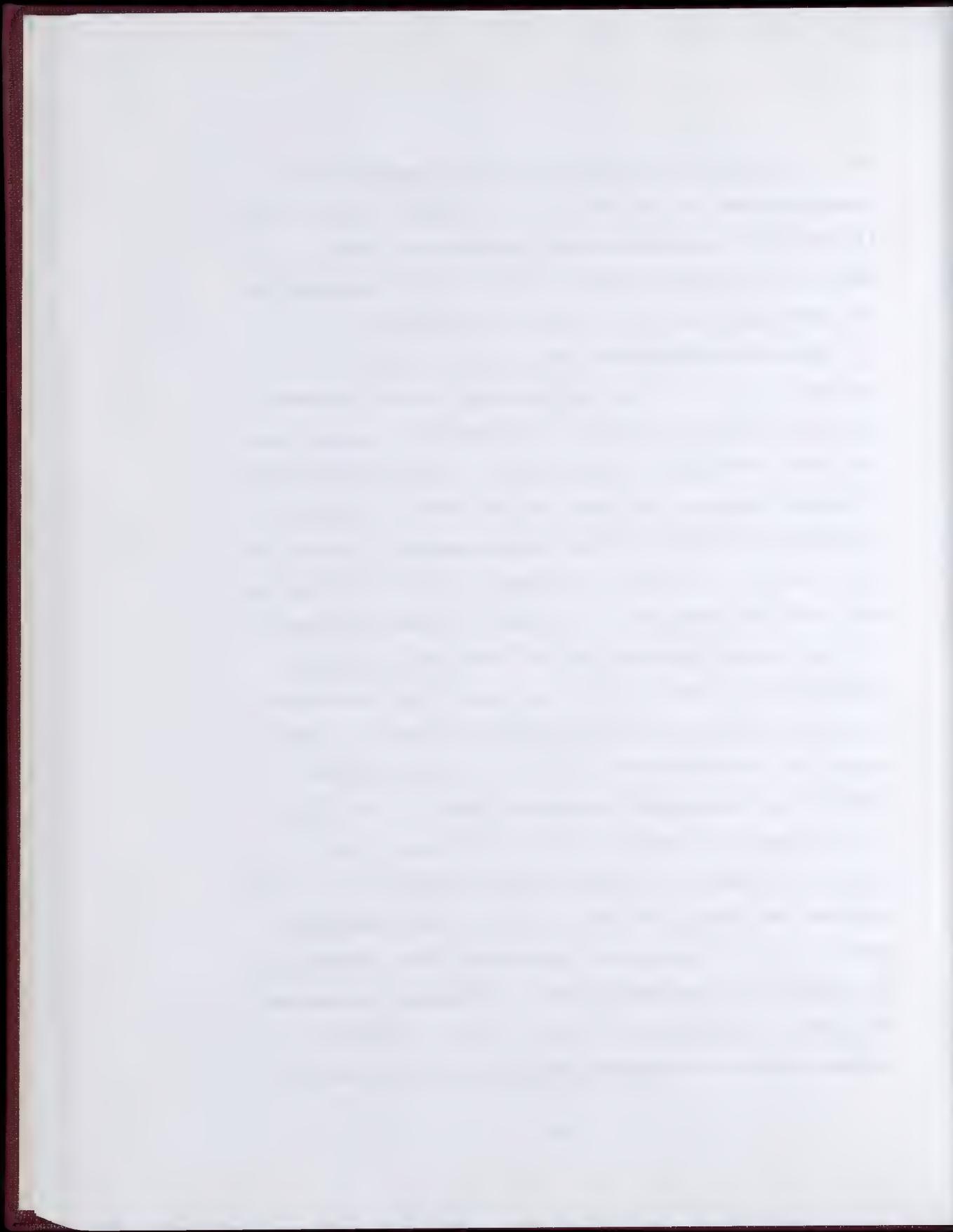
going to go from Cleveland down to the Smithsonian in Washington, and they had set aside--this was about 1979 I think, so we were talking about that kind of dollar then--a budget for the installation of the exhibition of \$250,000. Did I think that would be sufficient? I said, "Well, you're not going to like what I'm about to say, but I must tell you that the installation cost us \$5,000." The partitions are all movable and there are special places to store them. Everything is done with color and paint. We have our own greenhouse, so we have all kinds of vegetation of one form or another to decorate in the galleries. In the case of oriental things, we got bamboo or palms. We got other things for others. So we were able to strip the gallery, restructure the gallery--in terms of the spaces--with the movable partitions. The cases all fit in. They have their own lighting. It doesn't cost us anything to put on a major exhibition and have it look very good. The system they use in most museums--and now the National Gallery [of Art] is the prime example--they literally clean out a gallery and build a new museum, a new gallery, inside that room. Moldings-- I mean, it costs a fortune. It just is unbelievably expensive the way they go about it. By designing that gallery that way, we were able to ensure in the future that the museum was not going to go under by



the increasing costs of installation of exhibitions.

There's no way you can do too much fiddling if you must do it with just moving partitions and coloring those partitions and then decorating with movable material that you developed yourself. I think it's terrific.

The auditorium worked out very well. We've had everything in it. We've had symposia. We've had dance groups. We have had-- Well, we always have chamber music and small orchestras, choral work. It's very flexible and it looks fine and it's right off the lobby. You don't have people traipsing through the galleries. You can open it at night, for example, for special performances and you don't have to open them. It's just the lobby and there's the auditorium right next to it. Just as for special exhibitions. If you go into the museum from the north entrance, you're in that indestructible lobby. On the right, you see the auditorium and on the left is the entrance to the special exhibition gallery. So if you want to open this special exhibition at night, for example, and you don't want to spend the money for guards all over the place, you can do it. So that everything that is part of the special program and that is temporary is together and everything that is permanent is together but back. And it works, I think. No, I think we all enjoyed working with Breuer and getting the Breuer wing.



It was a fulfillment of long-term hopes and thoughts brought on basically by, I think, a somewhat traumatic experience of building and so forth of the 1958 wing.

In the case of the 1958 wing, Leonard [C. Hanna Jr.] was still alive. He died before it was finished, before it was opened, but he was there for the groundbreaking ceremony and he saw it developing somewhat. Leonard formed a Hanna Fund, and that footed most of the bill. The museum raised some money but not very much. Emery May [Norweb] and the finance committee and I talked a great deal about the financing of the Breuer wing. We did try to go out and raise some money, basically from the museum family, the membership, and people interested in the museum. The Gartner Auditorium we were able to fund from the agreement we'd already made with the Gartners [Louise M. and Ernst L.] when they made their bequest that we could use some of the principal for the auditorium. But for the rest of it we were able to get a court order with regard to the purchase funds, the income from the purchase funds that we could use, and I've forgotten what it was. We used a certain percentage over a period of three years on the grounds that the new wing was making possible conservation laboratories--and a big increase in that--new library space, research areas, all these things that are ancillary to the maintenance of the permanent collection.



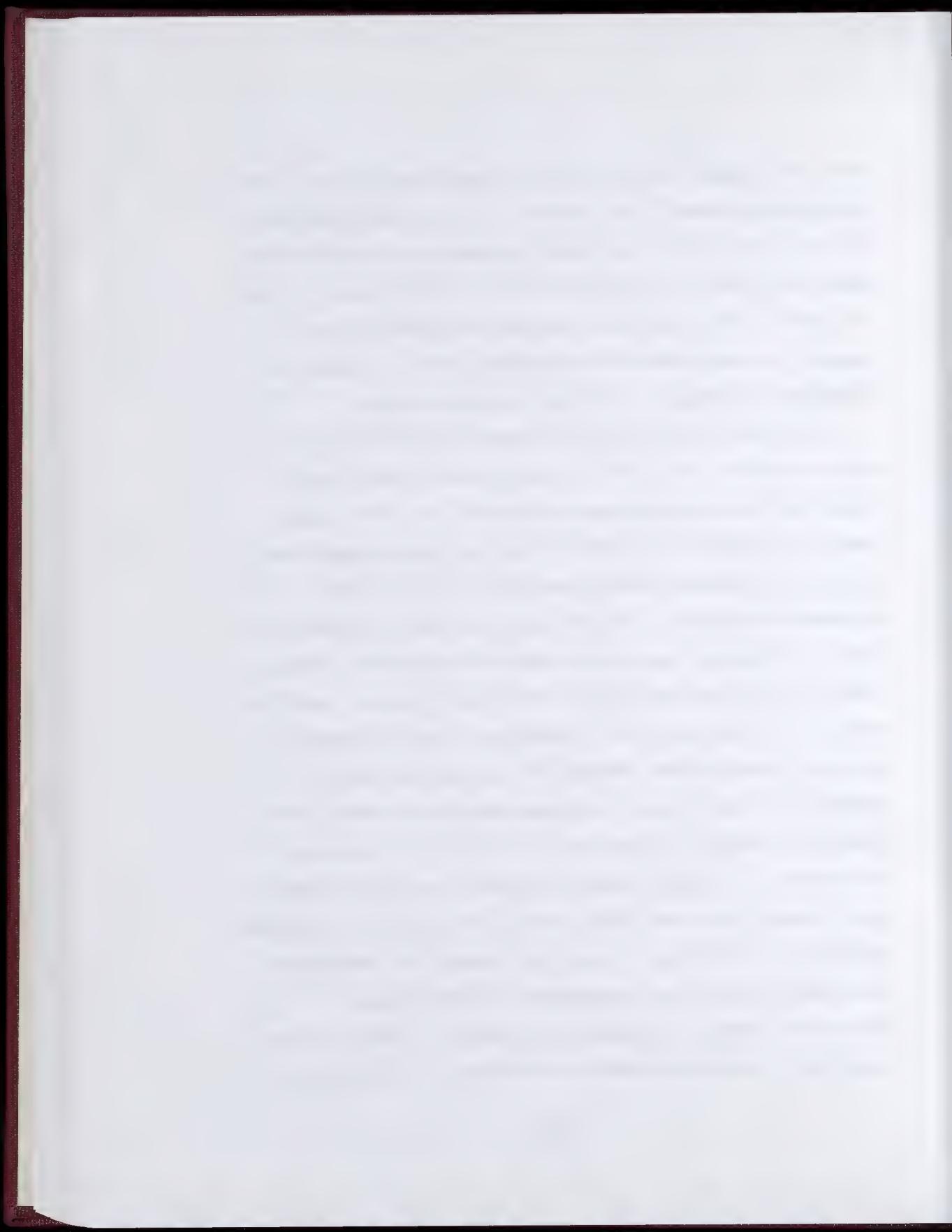
So we were able to finance the considerable part of that \$6 million-plus for the Breuer wing by that method. It made some of the curators upset, because of course they kept thinking of all the little goodies they could get with that money. But in the long run it really didn't hurt that much, and once again, we didn't have to go out and have a big citywide campaign and then compete with the United Way and all this other stuff and the orchestra and etc.

The third wing that we did, which was just opened soon after I retired, was a library addition, which was badly needed. The library was really tight, and there was also the area where the conservation stuff had to be expanded. So we got a local architect to plan a functional, simple library addition that gave plenty of stack space and a whole new library and above it gallery space for the much expanded collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art. That was done so it fit in with the galleries of the west wing of the 1958 building. We did that for, I think, about \$4 million. It worked out to something just under \$100 a square foot--this is '82 to '84. That was a very, very economical building. The architect, Peter van Dyck, who was a friend, kept saying that he was just building an outhouse. I said, "I know what you want. You want to do something that is going to



rival the Breuer wing. But that's not what we want. We want gallery space. The interior is much more important. We want a library. This is all interior stuff that's very important. We want the outside to be unobtrusive. It's set back. It's built near the back entrance of the museum. We don't want it to compete with the great 1916 classical building or with the Breuer building."

One other thing about the Breuer building which I should mention: The 1958 building worked pretty well inside but the exterior was not happy. It was Swedish granite, red below and buff above, and window apertures were sort of papery looking and thin. It was not a successful exterior. One of the great genius things that Breuer did was to design his wing so it sort of enveloped the 1958 building except for the interior court, which is very attractive, and that's untouched. But it simply is as if it didn't exist, though the spaces are still in there of course. There were some people who were upset about that thing. But before it was built, the local architect, [J.] Byers Hayes, who was a very good friend of mine-- Byers, who was a real champ, wrote me a nice letter and said, "I want you to know and I want the trustees to know that I think that the design for the Breuer building"--which I had shown him because I realized this might be a touchy problem--"is marvelous, and I fully



agree that it should cover the 1958 wing. I am not proud of the exterior of that building." That saved a lot of trouble. If anybody wanted to say something, just read that.

GARDNER: That's right. In 1971, also, Mrs. Norweb passed on the chairmanship to--

LEE: Lewis.

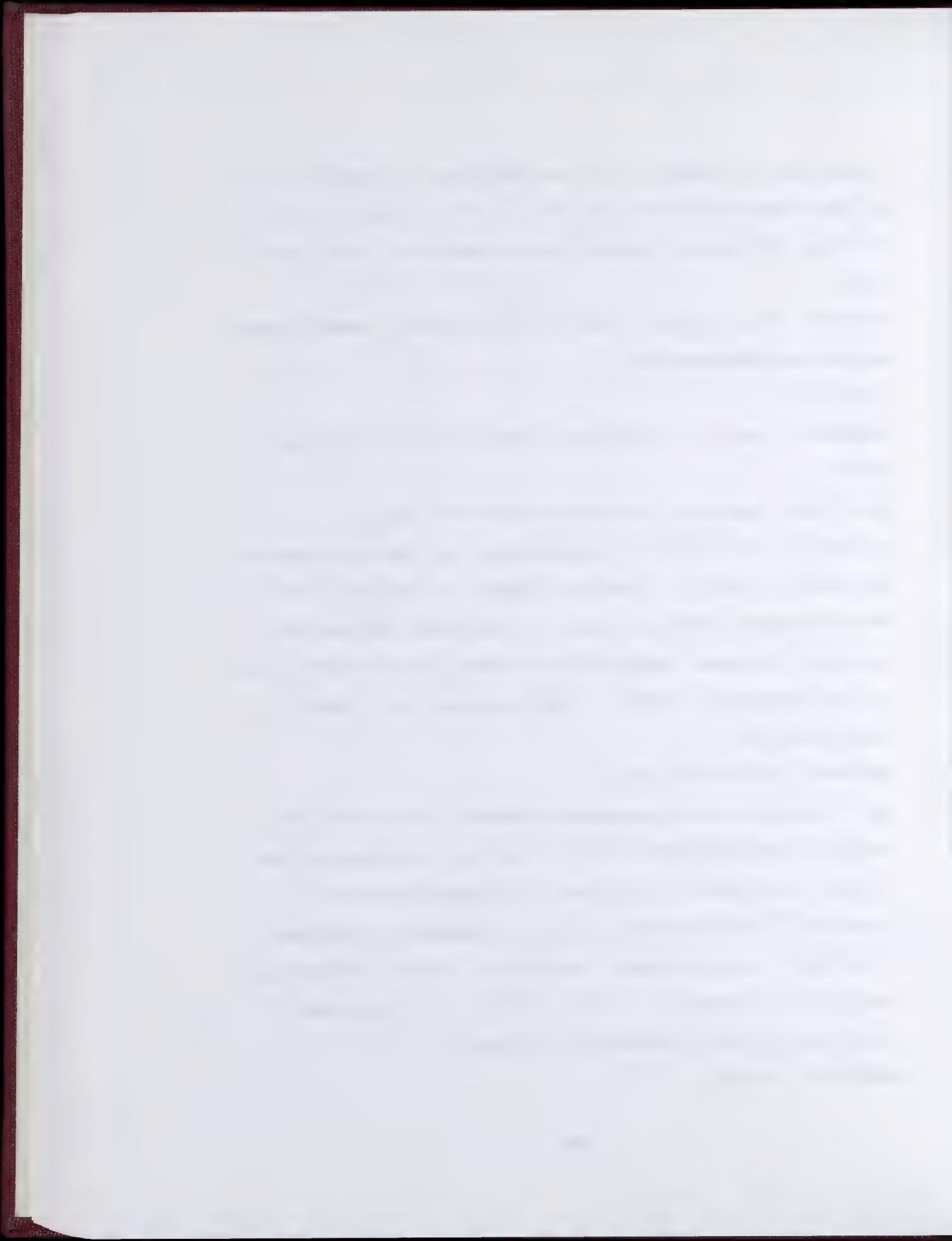
GARDNER: Lewis [C.] Williams. What were the reasons for that?

LEE: Well, she felt that the Breuer wing was her building. That was her contribution, and she felt that it was time to move on. And her husband was getting older. So she stepped aside and Lewis C. Williams, the son of Lewis B. Williams, became the president of the board. Lew was an investment broker. [tape recorder off] Well, where were we?

GARDNER: Lewis Williams--

LEE: Now, he was an investment broker. His father had been the vice president of the board and chairman of the finance committee and had been the Federal Reserve director in the Depression and the president of National City Bank. He was a very, very quiet, rather unassuming, very private person. A little jittery. It developed later that he had Alzheimer's [disease].

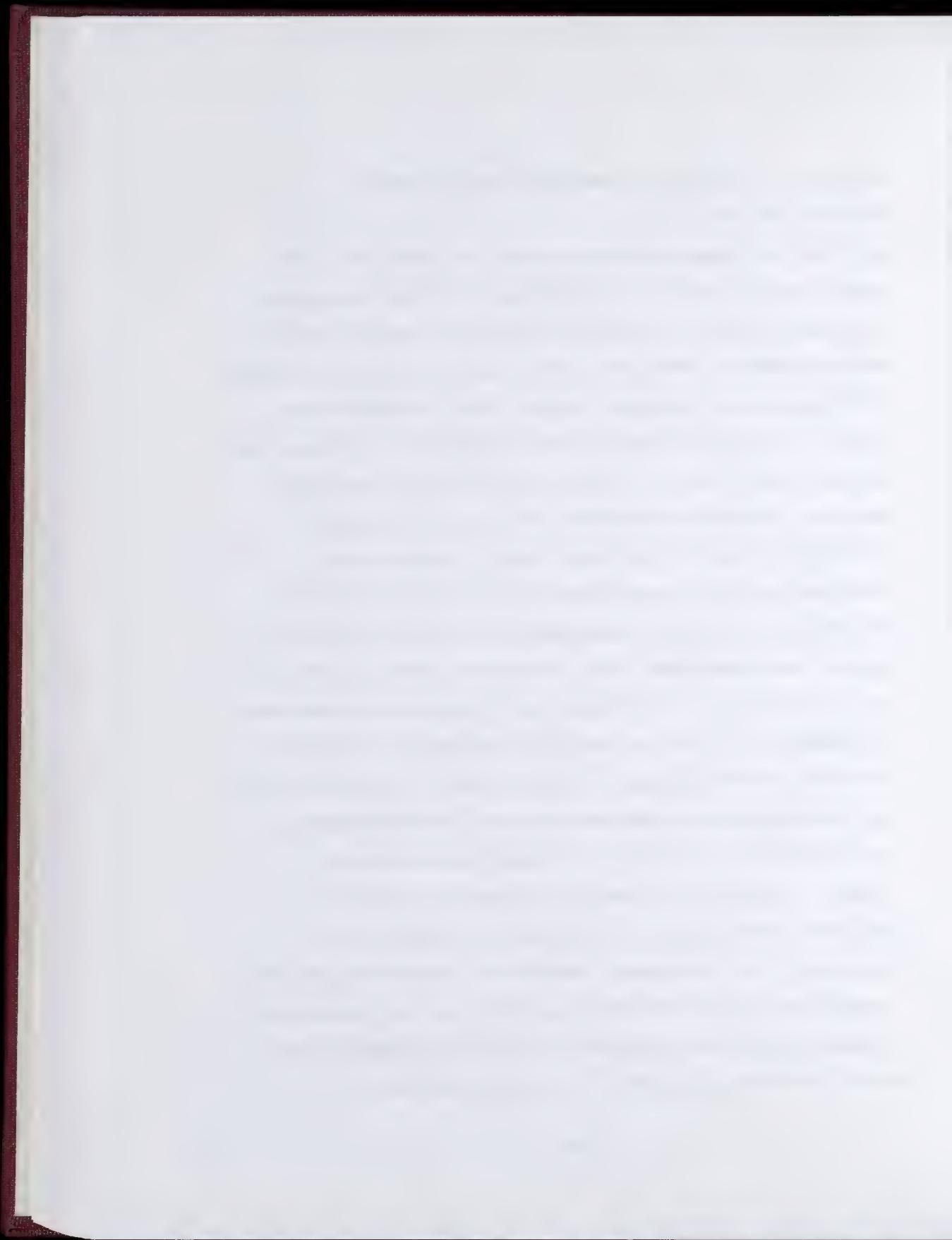
GARDNER: Really?



LEE: Yes. He's now in terrible shape, I think.

GARDNER: Oh, how sad.

LEE: But it began to show a little bit later on. His modus operandi was that we would meet at what is called the Tavern Club. They had a squash court and it was a very interesting arts and crafts building, one of the best buildings around Cleveland, with a fine, large Tiffany window. He liked to discuss things privately with me, and we would meet there for lunch usually and go over stuff. You know, we'd done the Breuer wing, and things were moving along and it was fairly quiet. The finance committee was very, very strong and Lew was president. The chairman of the finance committee before was Ralph [S.] Schmitt and then after that-- After that who was it? Oh, yes, Al [Alton W.] Whitehouse [Jr.], who was the president of Standard Oil. He was canned by BP [British Petroleum]. Alton Whitehouse succeeded Lew Williams. I would say that the committees were more powerful than the president in that late period. Harold [T.] Clark was a dominant figure. Emery May was certainly a dominant figure. Lew was just quiet and he liked things to be calm. No surprises. All the people really like the museum and they respect the museum and they know that they've got a great responsibility, but they know also it's a wonderful one to have. Lew simply played it very, very low-key.

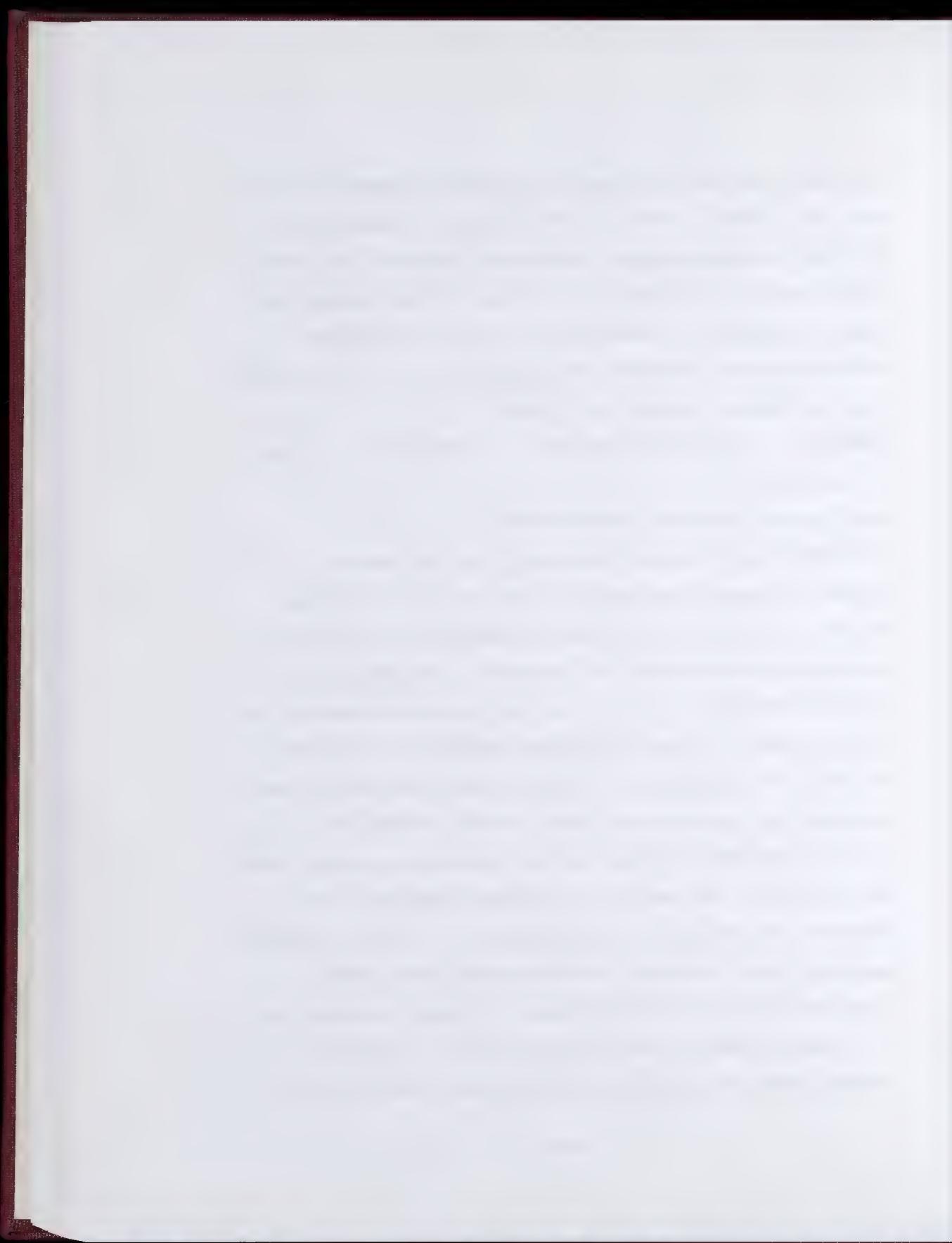


GARDNER: Did that have any impact on your operations or--?

LEE: No, I don't think so. The man who succeeded Lew Williams was Jim Dempsey. James [H.] Dempsey [Jr.] was my tennis partner. We were both members of the Hangar, an indoor tennis court where we met-- Anyway, we played. John Wilbur was a trustee and a player as well. They must have Jim Dempsey there, don't they?

GARDNER: I'm trying to see where it mentions him. Yes, he came out in '64.

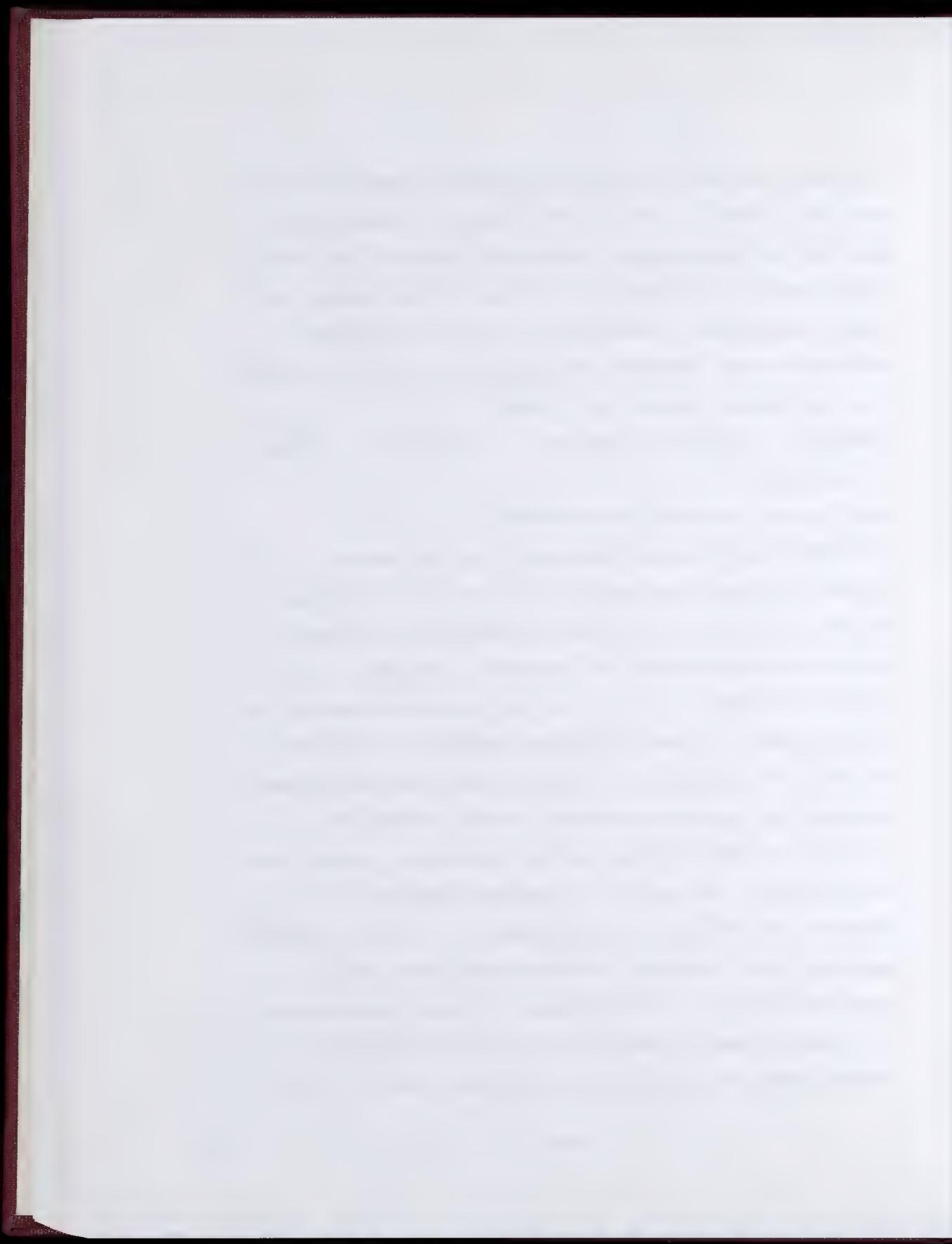
LEE: Right. Lew Williams retired, got off the presidency, and Dempsey took over. He's a lawyer-- Squires, Sanders, and Dempsey firm--and he was a great friend of John Wilbur's. They're both Yale [University]-- Cleveland's a Yale town, as you know. Jim Dempsey had rowed on the Yale crew just as John Wilbur had been on the football team. He was a stronger personality than Lew and he was quite conservative. We saw each other very often socially and on the tennis court and we talked about this, that, or the other thing. But he, especially, didn't want any surprises. He wanted to know what problems there might be and when they might develop, etc., etc. I always kept him fully informed. He was a very, very good president and he took more charge of things than Lew had. If I had not been a good friend of his and so forth, I suspect that the relationship might have been a little



more difficult, but as it was, it worked out very well.

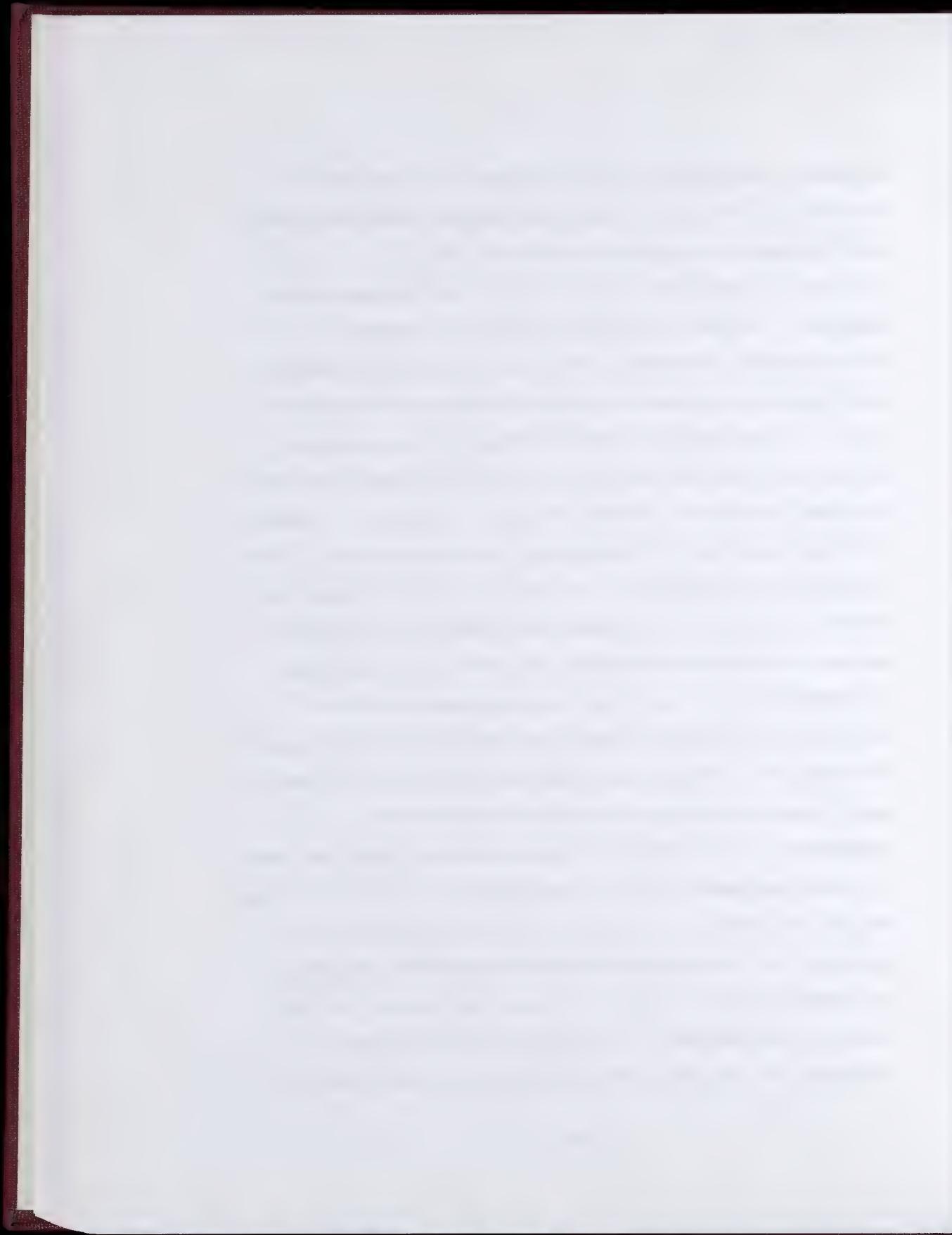
When it came time to do the financial thing for the new wing--another new wing we knew we had to do for the library and the galleries--we did do some fund-raising and I went out to various people. Jim and I went to see Dave [David C.] Ingalls and the Ingalls family, and they made a very substantial contribution. That's why it's called the Ingalls Library. It was a million-plus dollars, which was the seed money that made it work. Other people then came in and the thing was funded. Jim was very instrumental in the development of that financing scheme and it worked. The whole thing was done with a minimum of fuss, as far as the museum's relationship with the community or the museum's finances went. It was very, very well done.

And incidentally, despite the fact that the architect, Peter van Dyck, felt that he was building an outhouse for the museum, Pete did an absolutely wonderful job of integrating that building with the existing buildings to make it work, in terms of access to the library, in terms of relationships with the galleries above, and in terms of the tremendous storage space for books down below. So the library has room to expand for a considerable period. Pete did a very good job. He just didn't get a chance to do a monumental building. He did a \$4 million building.



GARDNER: The planning for the Breuer wing had started virtually at the moment the other one had been completed. Was the same true of the library wing or--?

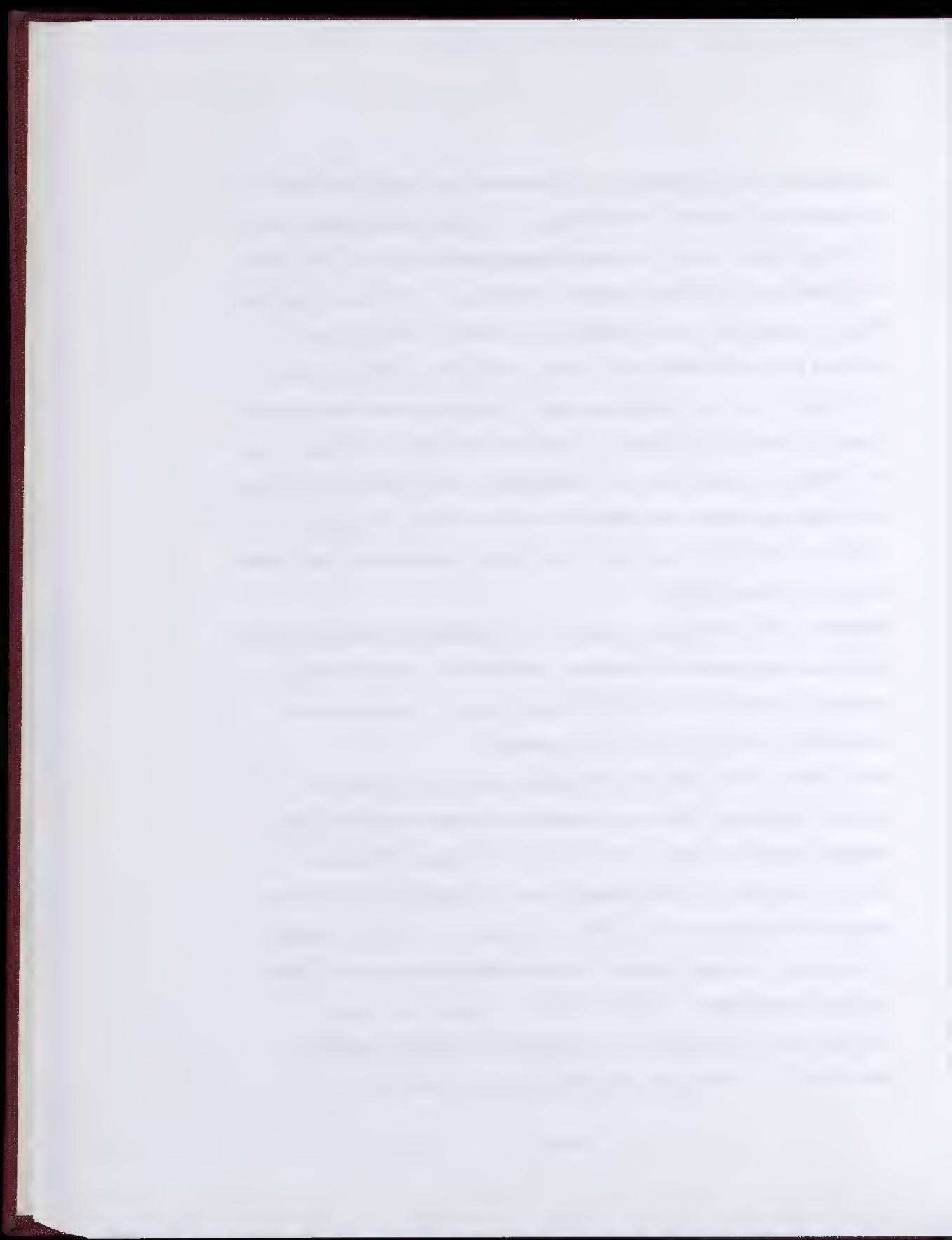
LEE: Well, again, you see that all these things fitted together. The old 1916 building with its central courts and peripheral galleries, then the U-shaped 1958 addition, which meant there was only one way you could go through that. It tied into the 1916 building at two different places and posed certain kinds of root problems, you see. But then, after the 1958 building was completed, we began thinking about what we were going to do about this. If we rearrange the collections, we have to have more space for conservation, we have to have more space for the library, we have to have more space for the education department. All these things. And then we had spaces in the old buildings that were not usable as gallery space but might be usable for office space, and the library, which was too small, was a very good size for the conservation department. So we had to develop a sort of plan that went in stages and meant that the key thing for the final stage was the relocation of the library totally out of its old area and the installation of the conservation department into the old library space. Having the library in the separate area adjacent to the gallery wing of the '58 building, in precisely the location where the greatest



expansion had occurred in nineteenth- or twentieth-century European art, meant we could put the galleries above and tie them into that. So everything would finally all work out when we built the library building. That would be the final thing that would make it all work. But it was carefully calculated and, again, Bill Ward, the museum designer, was very instrumental. The trustees were fully aware of what was going on. We had our own drawings, our own ideas and everything. Everybody knew that it was sort of a process that was going to require time and some juggling and working. But the final linchpin in the thing was the library wing.

GARDNER: Why the great need for a library, given the fact that the Case Western Reserve [University] would have a strong library in art history and so on? What is the rationale for a library in a museum?

LEE: Well, the Case Reserve does not have a good art history library. The art historical department at Case Western Reserve when I came here were Tommy [Thomas] Munro, who was in the museum, and Dr. Lamberton, who was over at the university. And that was it. Plus a couple of others. Finley Foster, a very good professor in the English department, did courses in English art and particularly in Hogarth in eighteenth-century England. That was it. They had not begun with a good art

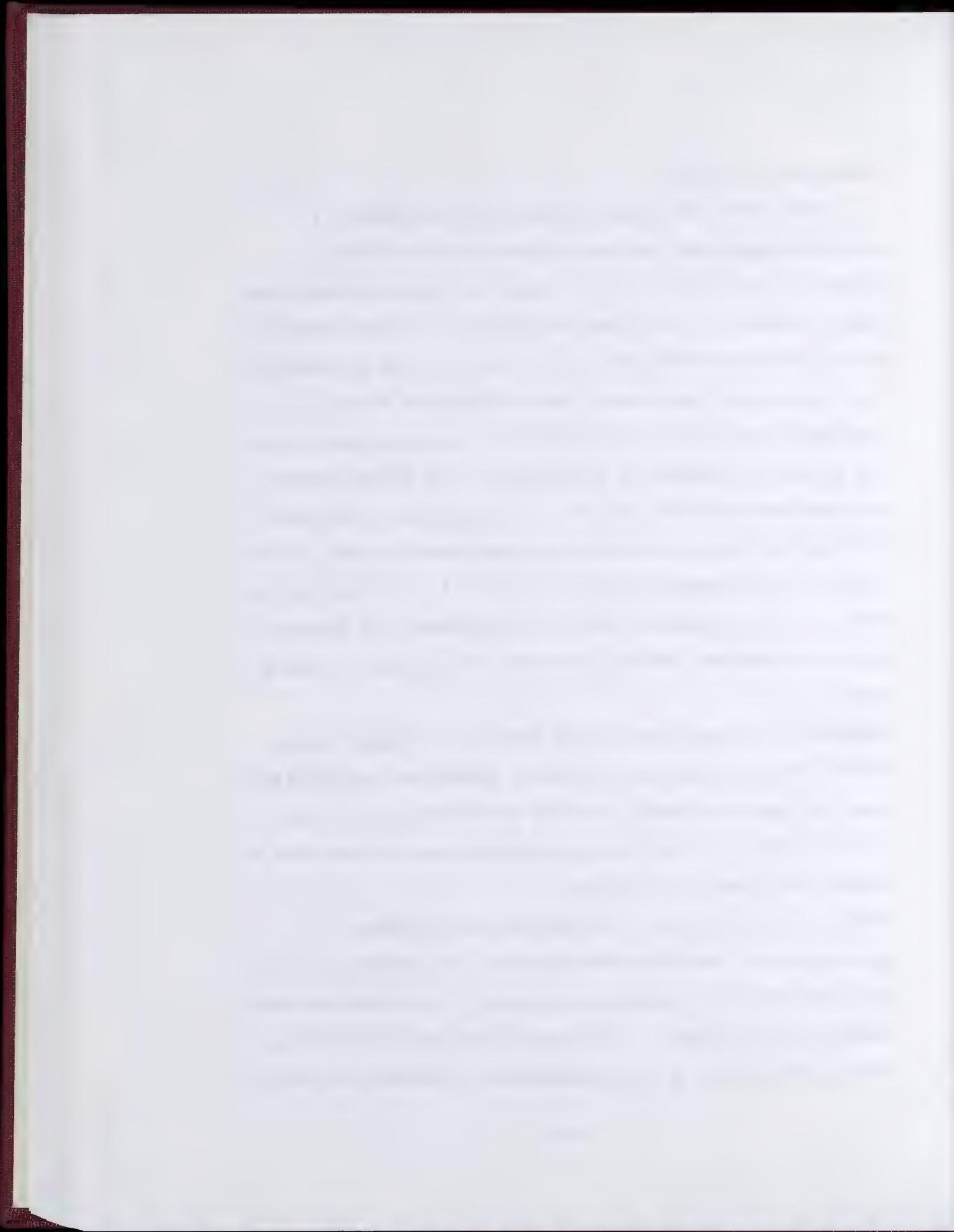


historical library.

The museum had begun way back in the 1920s. It purposely developed and has a great art historical library. That's one of the reasons we wanted to have the joint program, so that the library would be used more by people, students from the university. So the location of the library and the size of the library was a very important part of this museum; it's recognized as one of the great art historical libraries in the United States. It's not nearly as big as Harvard [University Fine Arts Library] or Yale [University Art Reference Library] or the Frick Art Reference [Library], but still, it's one of the major, major libraries. So that requirement of the new library space was just as important as the gallery space above it.

GARDNER: Is there acquisition money on a regular basis? One of the problems for university libraries, particularly over the last ten years, was the proliferation of the journals and so on and the inability to keep up or have a budget that kept up with that.

LEE: I'm not familiar with the current budgetary situation with regard to the library. My impression is that they're going along pretty well. There are dedicated funds for the library. Not enough, but there always has been in the budget a very substantial provision for staff



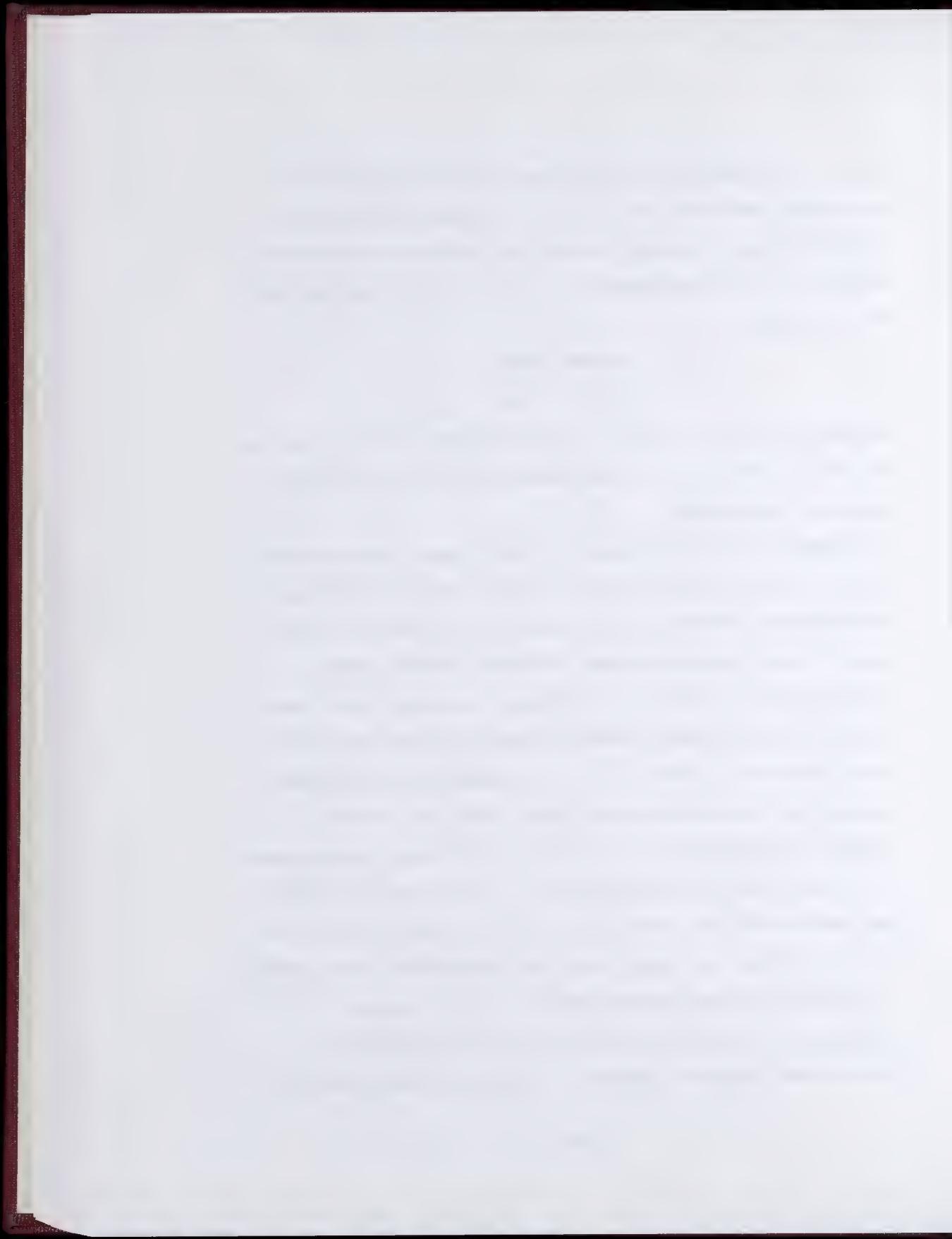
and for book acquisitions and periodical acquisitions. I think they may have had to cut back some on periodicals, but it's a major, major library and it's a responsibility, and so far it's been accepted and it's still healthy, as far as I know.

SECOND PART

JULY 15, 1992

GARDNER: To begin with, as we discussed, I would like you to tell me the story of the Grünewald and the ups and downs of attribution.

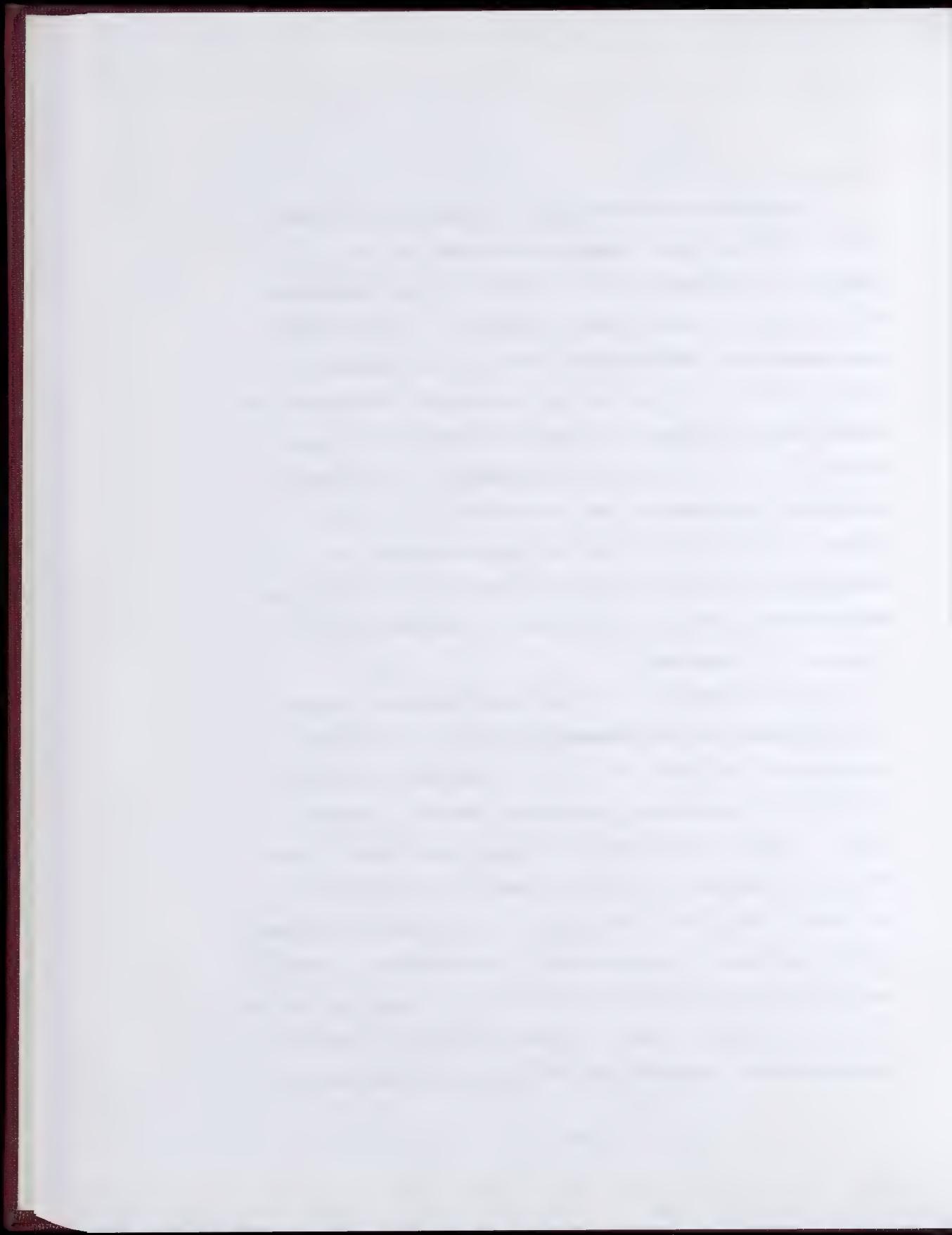
LEE: The so-called Grünewald. Yes. Well, the question in all kinds of things is not "Do you make any mistakes?" The question is "How many mistakes do you make?" You're simply bound to make errors. The very first Chinese painting that I bought at Cleveland [Museum of Art] was a forgery, by the famous modern Chinese painter and forger Chang Ta-ch'ien, of an orchid and bamboo scroll--almost a copy of one that no one knew about that was in China. I bought it from Howard [C.] Hollis, and within three months I was convinced that it was wrong. The trouble is that one wasn't able to do all the research first. But in any case, that made me very, very-- It was a very good lesson and made me perhaps hypersensitive on the subject. I think after that, by and large, in our collecting of Chinese and Japanese painting, we made no major, major



boo-boos.

I think the classic example of acquiring a forgery and the mind-set that leads up to it and sort of conditions the event was the purchase of the Grünewald, the so-called Grünewald Saint Catherine, in 1978 or the late seventies. William [M.] Milliken had emphasized German medieval art, and we had a wonderful collection of German medieval things and some very fine German panel paintings of late Gothic and Renaissance. I had been enormously impressed by the German baroque in south Germany and in Austria, and we had made a point of developing the collection of that material, which I think was the best in the United States. So we had a real strength in German art.

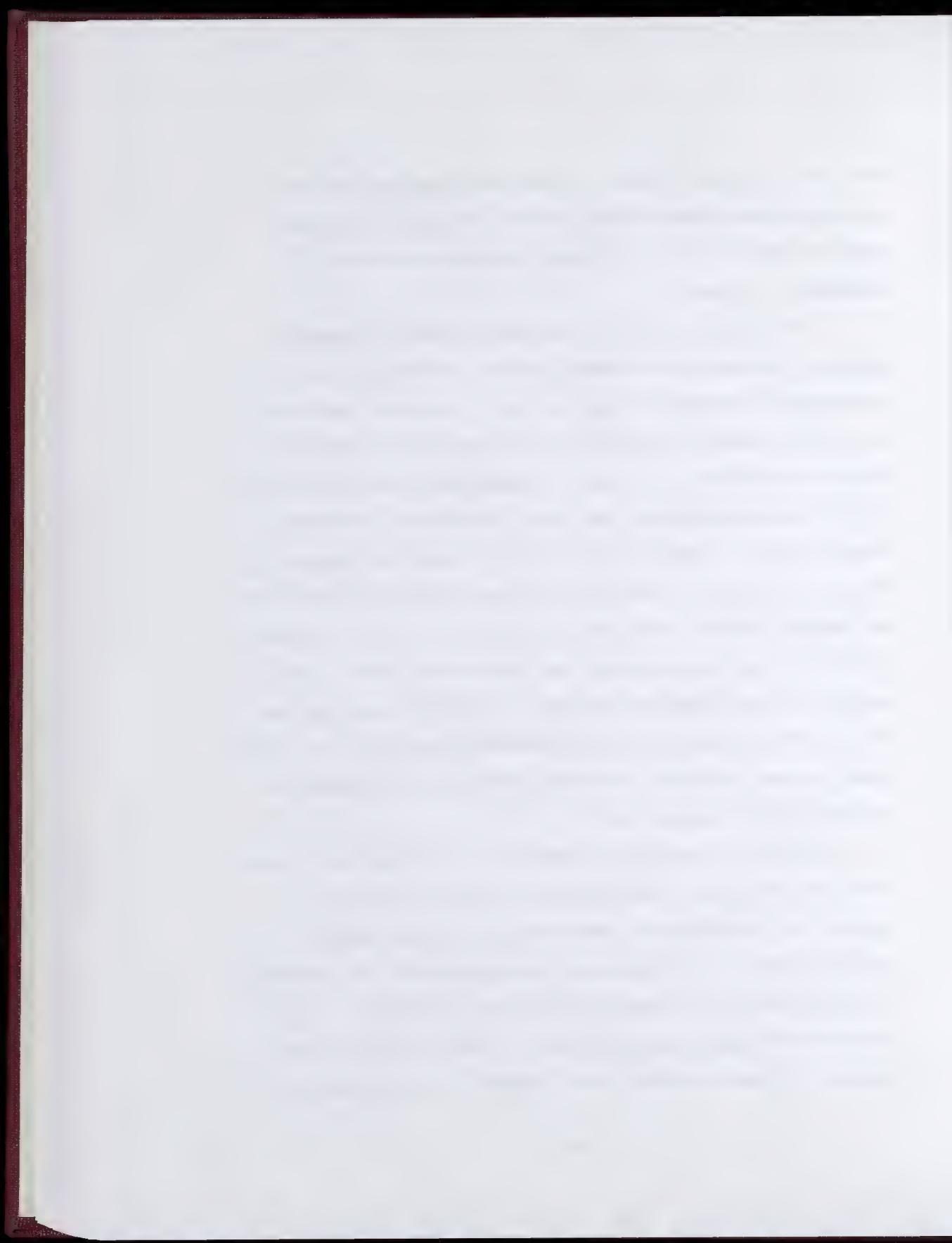
I got a phone call one day from Frederick Mont, a very reputable and knowledgeable dealer in old master paintings in New York. He was very excited and said he wanted me to come to New York right away if I possibly could: he had a very important German painting. I said, "Well, tell me more." He said, "Well, it's Grünewald." So I said, "Well, I'll be there." I went over and we met at his apartment. Then we went to the restorer, a German lady--whose name will occur perhaps in a minute or two--to see the painting on panel. It had some sort of remains of Gothic writing characters on the back that said "Mainz,"



the city. It was a panel. There are drawings for the panel and four other panels of the altarpiece that was made for the cathedral of Mainz towards the end of Grünewald's career.

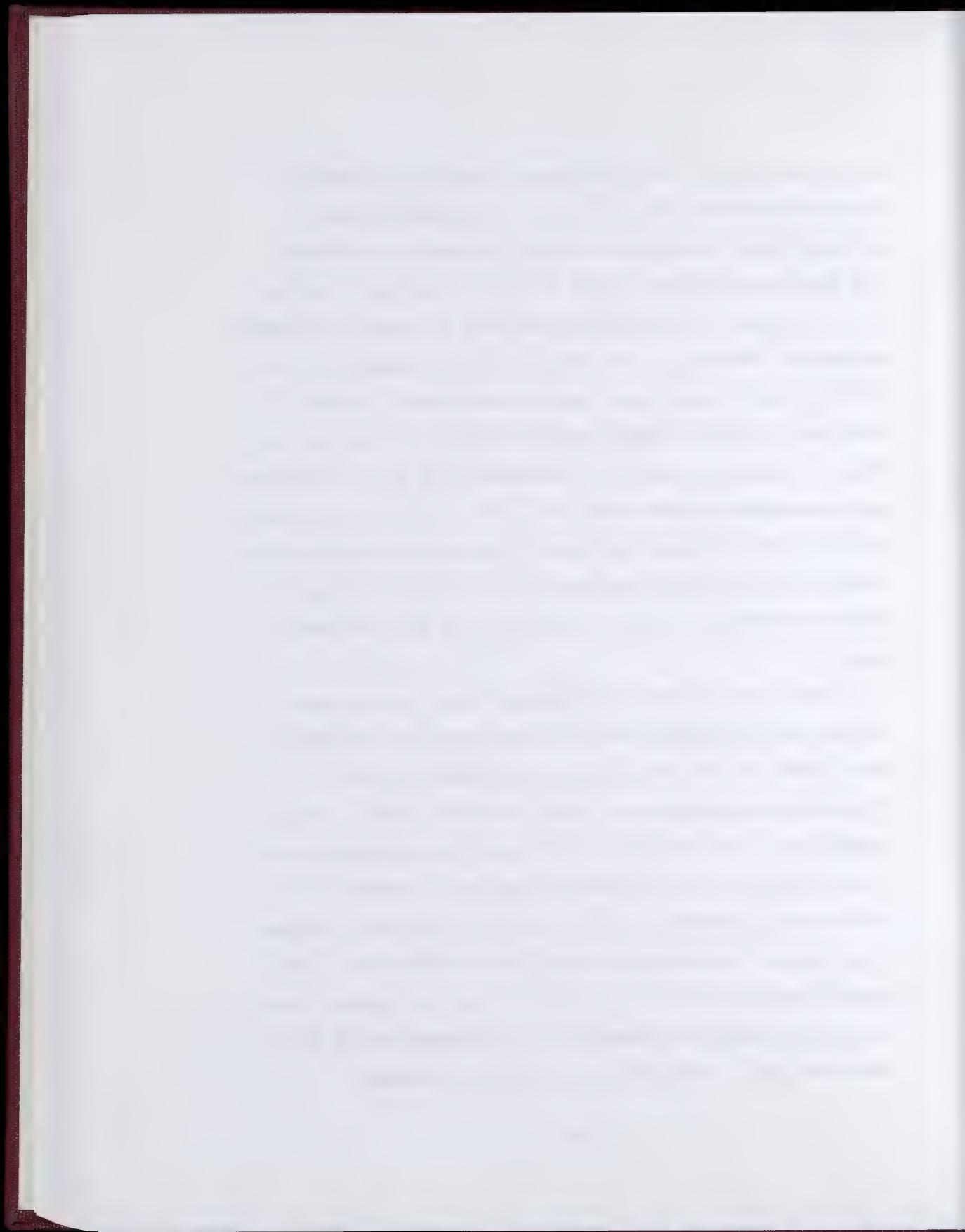
A few years before, I had been to see the Isenheim Altar by Grünewald at Colmar [France], which was one of the great experiences in all of art. You know the mind-set with a German collection but no Grünewald-- There's only one Grünewald in America, a painting, and that one's at the National Gallery [of Art]. There was a Grünewald drawing at the [LeRoy M.] Backus collection in Seattle which I had tried to get Dick [Richard] Fuller to get, but he thought it was just a drapery study. It didn't appeal to him, so that escaped me. We bought two, three, four beautiful Dürer drawings for the collection over the last ten or twelve years until the Grünewald came up. So, you know, it was a kind of mind-set. Here was our chance to cap the German collection.

The picture was very attractive; it looked very fine. There was the preliminary drawing for the figure in Berlin, and the restorer, who was a perfectly honest, reliable person, was impressed to no end with the picture. We had it out to the museum on approval, and the conservation department went over it and everything was gung ho. I had a couple of my friends in the scholarly



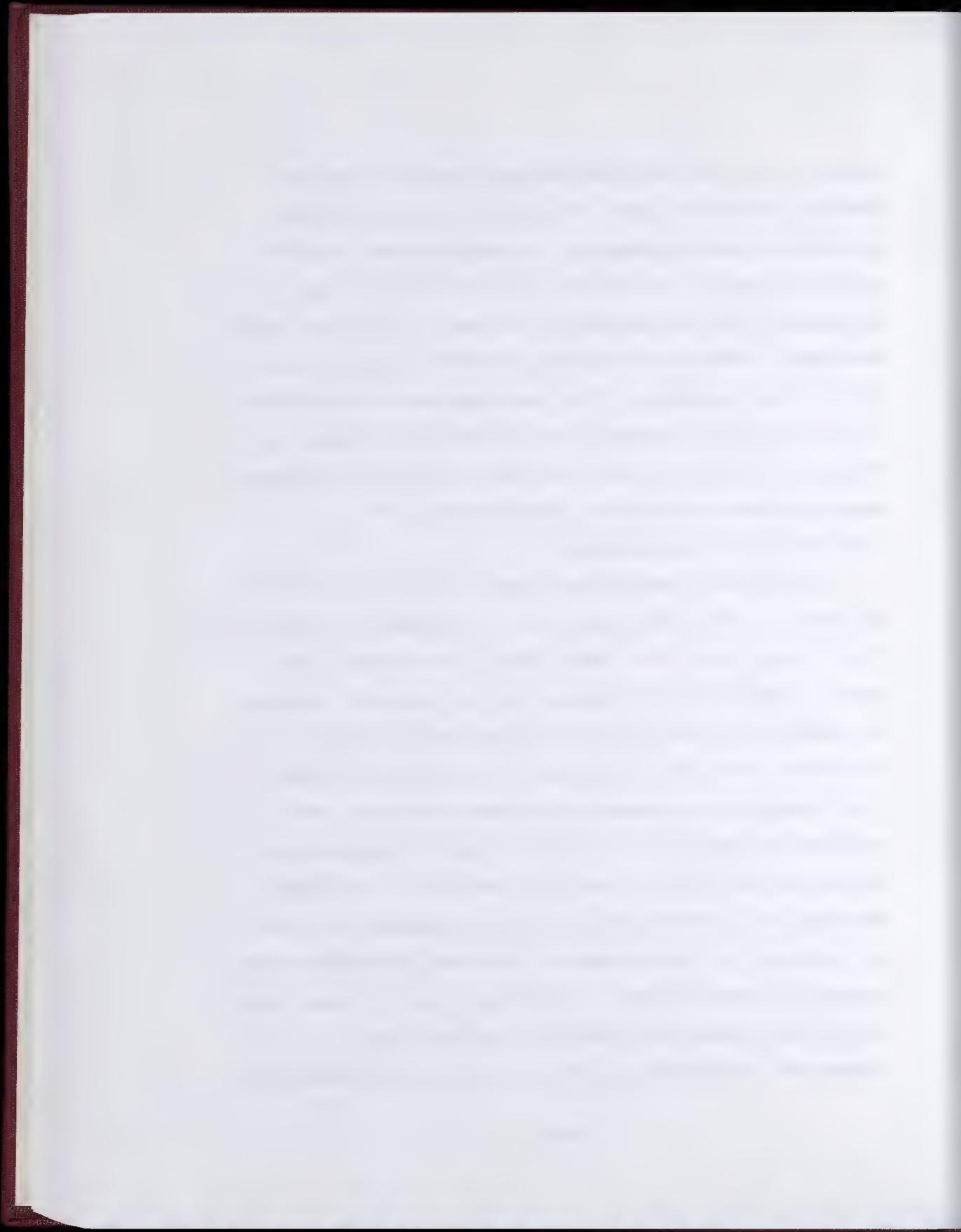
world look at it. Wolf [Wolfgang] Stechow at Oberlin [College] and William Suhr and Mario Modestini had expressed some reservations about it from a photograph, and they came out and looked at it and they left pretty well convinced. So we all agreed that we should go ahead and buy it and do it. So we got it. We bought it. One scholar had, I found out, said it was a fake, flatly. That was Konrad Oberhuber, who was then teaching at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard. Oberhuber was quite intuitive and a somewhat strange man. Very, very gifted, very good eye, but very strange. He went in for Rosicrucianism and other kinds of things that were a little bit strange. I paid attention to that but I didn't-- We felt we were okay.

Then I got a letter in the mail from Munich from another man--no relationship to the source of our painting that I know of, no connection with Frederick Mont-- offering us a second panel from the Mainz altar. This one looked very, very strange--and I mean really strange--and I was just in a state of shock, because I thought, "This painting is a forgery, the one that has just been offered to us, and it is clearly related to our painting." That night I couldn't sleep. I mean, it was just awful. The next day I asked the conservation department to go at it, tooth and nail. Ross Merrill, who later became



conservator at the National Gallery, said that he was going to go over it again, because he had a few little questions he wanted answered. He went through it but it was quite clear. The next day I looked again at the photographs from Munich, and I just said, "You know, we've been had." And it was a fairly substantial sum of money for the late seventies. Then Ross reported to me and said that he had found something, there was a discrepancy in materials. I've forgotten the exact thing, but there was something amiss physically, scientifically. The combination was irresistible.

So I called Frederick Mont and I said, "I've got very bad news. I think that painting is a forgery." He said, "Oh, it can't be." So I said, "Well, I'm coming to New York. I have all the evidence, and you just wait and let me present it to you and you tell me what you think." So I did that, and after I finished, he said, "It's a fake. I was wrong and how can we straighten this out?" Well, I told the trustees about it before I went to New York and I was authorized to try to work out something. Fred Mont was very, very honest and very straightforward, as I knew he would be. He didn't have all the cash, but about three quarters of what we spent he could give back in cash, and then he had a very fine early Italian painting, Florentine, late Gothic painting, which was in quite good



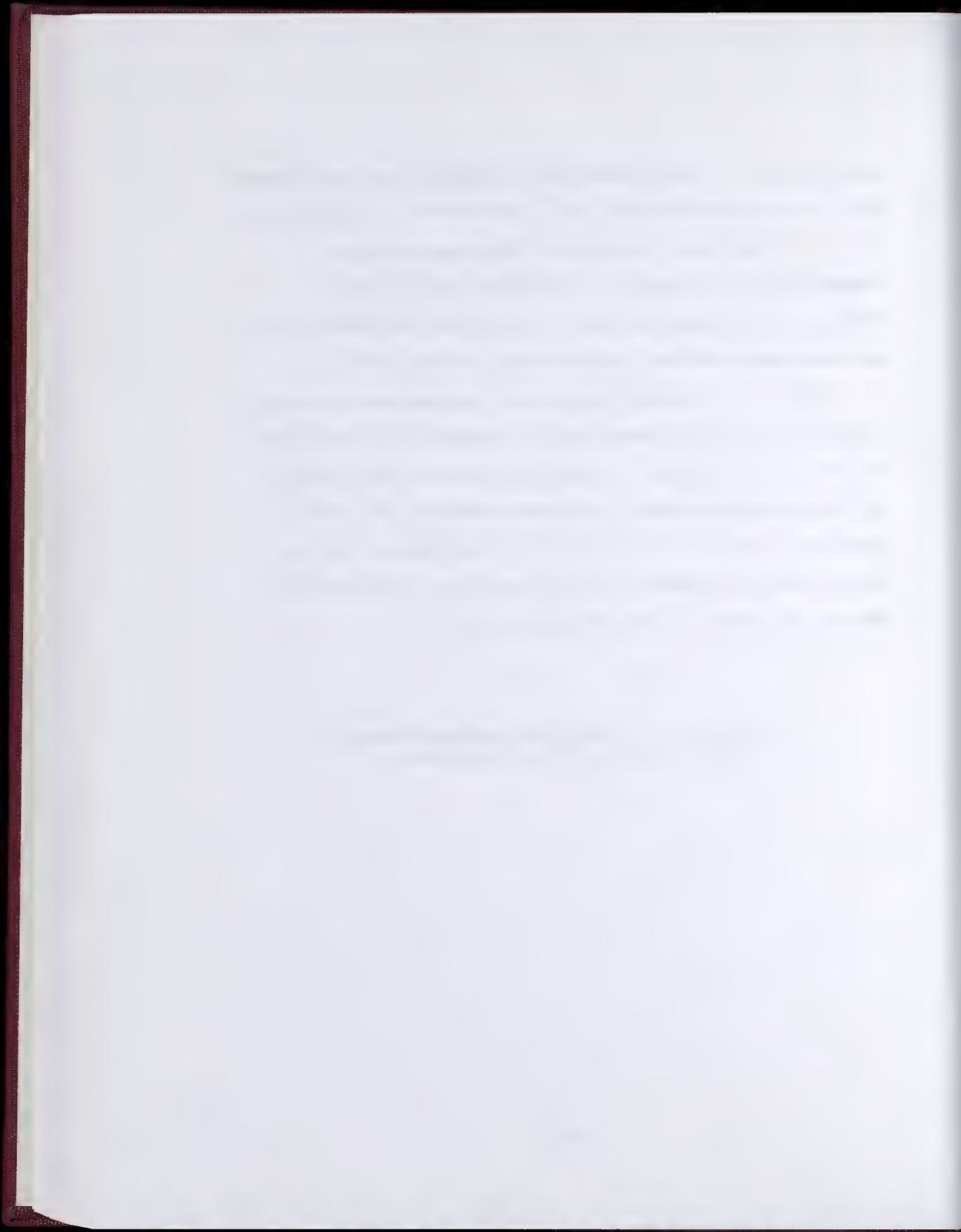
condition and a really excellent painting. He would throw that in to finish it off. So I agreed that we would take that. Then we were immediately able then, without somebody else telling us, to announce that we had discovered this painting was no good and that restitution had been made that was satisfactory to both sides.

It was just another example of how you must be very careful and you can always make a mistake. On the whole, it was a classic case. I mean, if someone had tried to set up a situation which would be conducive to letting down one's guard, the elements were all there. It was just a matter of their falling into place, and they did and we fell for it. And that was that.

* * *

[This portion of the text has been sealed
at the request of the interviewee.]

* * *

























GARDNER: What about Anthony Blunt? What was he like?

Did you know him well enough?

LEE: Well, he was, you know, very thin, ascetic looking, with a Cambridge drawl. He didn't like Americans. He was a very fine scholar in the field of the history of art, documents and language and so forth. His connoisseurship was occasionally, I think, suspect. I first ran into him-- We agreed to buy in London a picture, a Duccio, a small panel from Julius Weitzner which Julius had discovered. It was a beautiful, beautiful painting. We had agreed to buy it, and the National Gallery-- Martin Davies, who was the director of the National Gallery, asked to have it reviewed by the export committee, because he wanted it for the National Gallery, he said. So they had a hearing, and Harold Clark and I went to that hearing. Blunt was on the panel and kept talking about the painting and why did the National Gallery want it. And then he would talk about the painting, and everything he said-- For instance, he thought that the throne was rather badly painted and how



could they say that that really was Duccio and so forth. Well, as a matter of fact, the throne is some of the best painting in the picture. There was something just not quite right about how he discussed the paintings and used these things. He and Davies didn't get on too well. There was just something in the way he handled himself and what he said that I thought was very slippery. I think I met him once after that at an opening of one of the dealers, [Thomas] Agnew [and Sons] or someplace in London, and he was very curt and abrupt. He didn't want to talk to Americans very much.

GARDNER: The next collections-related story you wanted to talk about was the Rockefeller collection.

LEE: Yes. I think that should be explained, because it was certainly a major event for me and it resulted in a wonderful collection that is now at the Asia Society in New York, left to them by Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller. It was in the early sixties that Mr. Rockefeller approached me.

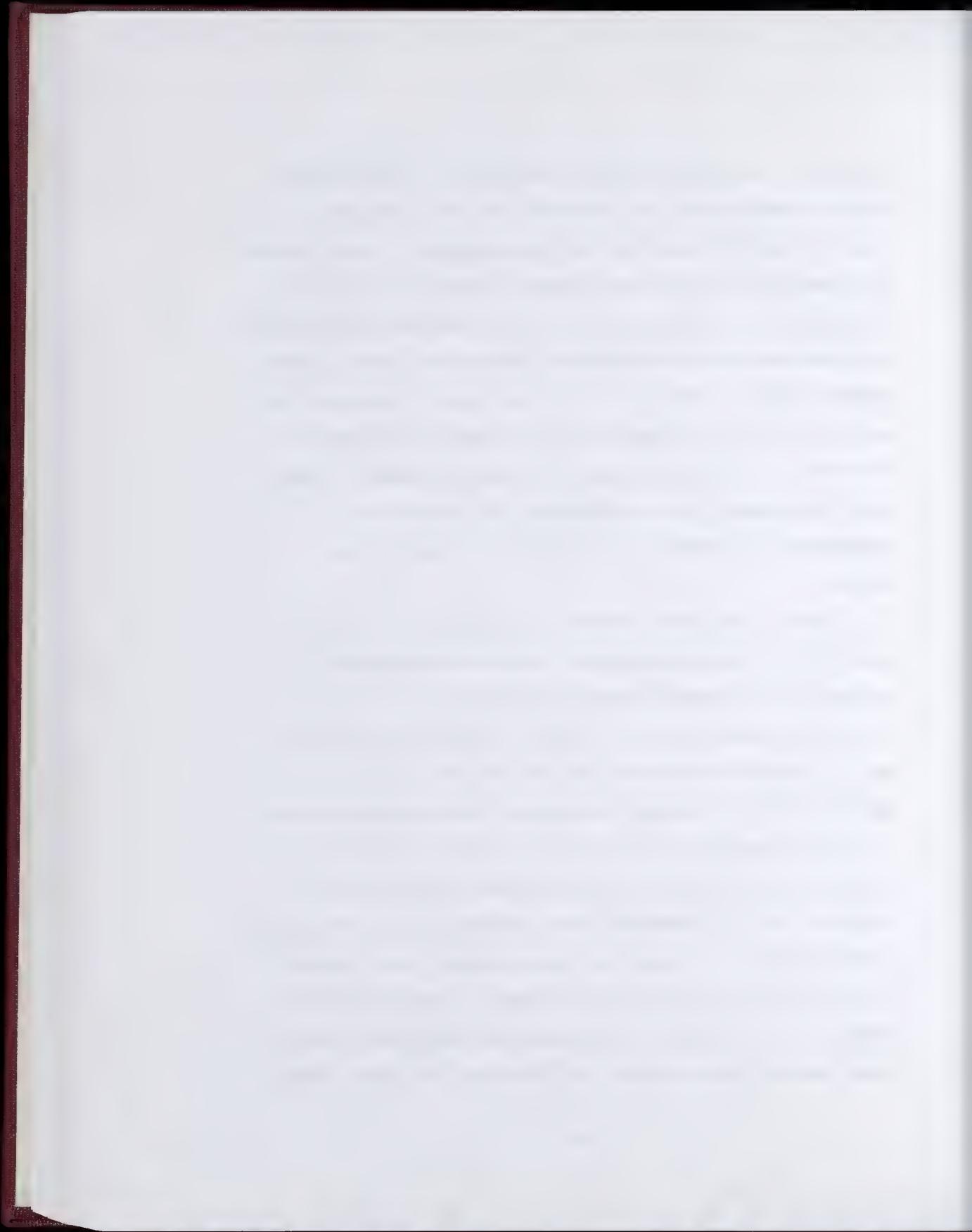
GARDNER: Which Rockefeller was that?

LEE: John D. Rockefeller III. And the story of this is also clearly spelled out in the book by John [E.] Harr and Peter [J.] Johnson, The Rockefeller Conscience. He approached me and asked if I would be willing to serve as his adviser. He had met me and I knew him a little bit



because of the Asia Society in New York. I was on the gallery committee of the Asia Society and I had done a couple of exhibitions for the Asia Society. Also I was on the committee of the Japan Society, which he was also connected with. He asked if I would come talk with him at his apartment and with his wife, Blanchette [Ferry Hooker Rockefeller]. I went to talk to him and I liked him very much. He's very straightforward and very aware and very sensitive to things, and she's an absolute peach. She's very, very good, very intelligent and a very good connoisseur of modern art in particular and art in general.

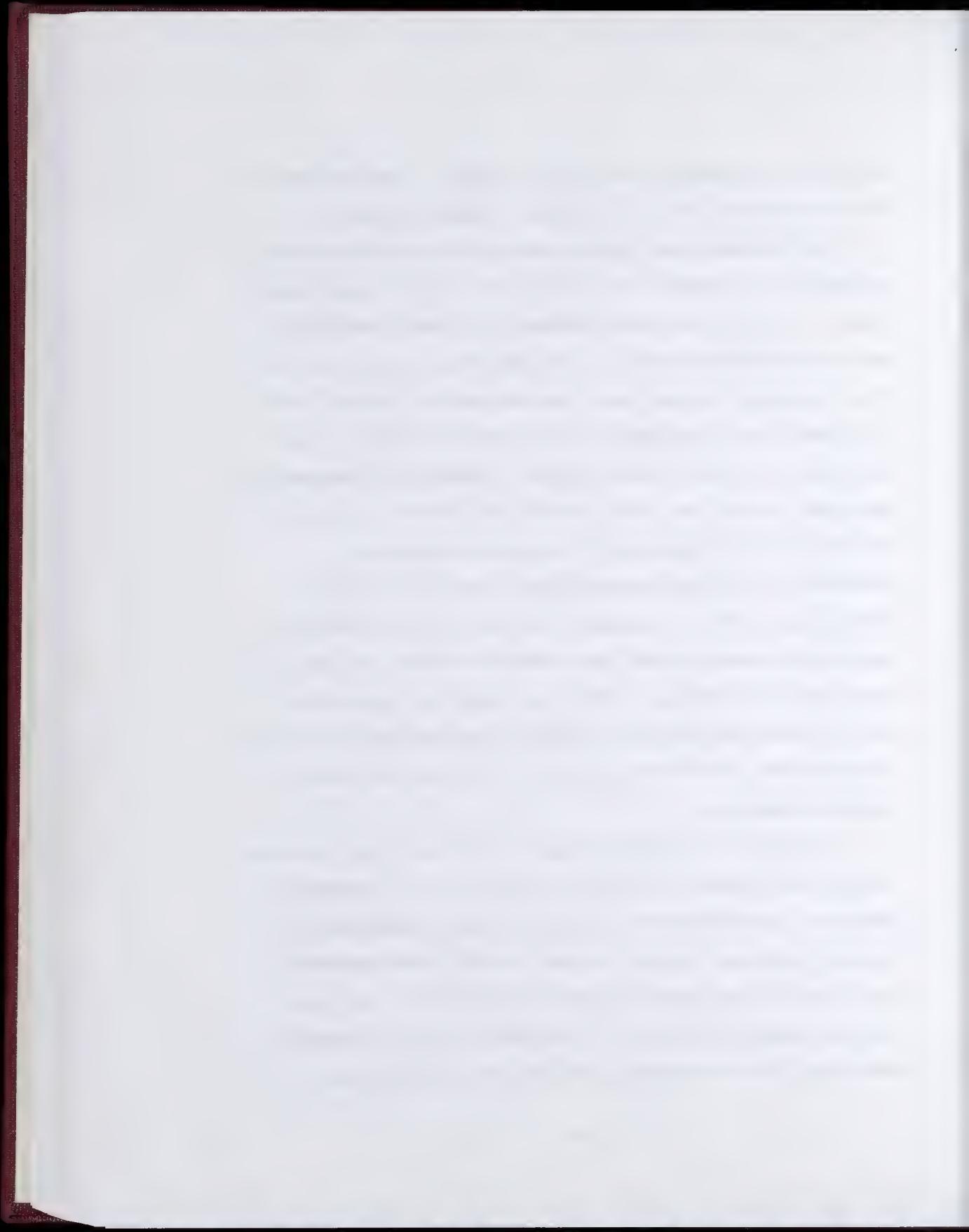
I said, "You know, there's a possibility--a clear possibility, a probability--of conflict of interest, because I'm the chief curator of oriental art for the Cleveland Museum of Art." I said, "We have to work that out. I would clearly have to get the permission and the approval of the board of trustees of the Cleveland Museum of Art if I were to do this." We worked out a system, which we followed when we finally went into operation, that was that if something were offered to him, he had the first refusal. If something were offered to me or the museum, then we had the first refusal. And we never had a problem. In the case of any question where there was a clear lack of knowledge of who received the first offer,



it would be decided by the flip of a coin. We only had to flip a coin once and, as a matter of fact, we won it.

The trustees were very-- Harold Clark was still the chairman of the board, and he thought it was a good idea. I knew it was a good idea, because with the Rockefellers and with Cleveland with its purchase funds, with the two of us working together under one adviser as it were, we would absolutely dominate the oriental art market. We would get just about first refusal, preferred treatment on anything. So it was going to help the museum as well as helping the Rockefellers. Of course, he was not interested in big monumental pieces that were sort of museum type. But it seemed to me that it would work out very advantageously, and, as a matter of fact, it did. It meant monthly meetings in New York with Mr. Rockefeller, and of course occasionally he would meet me abroad to look at things and look at the market. But over the years, it really worked out.

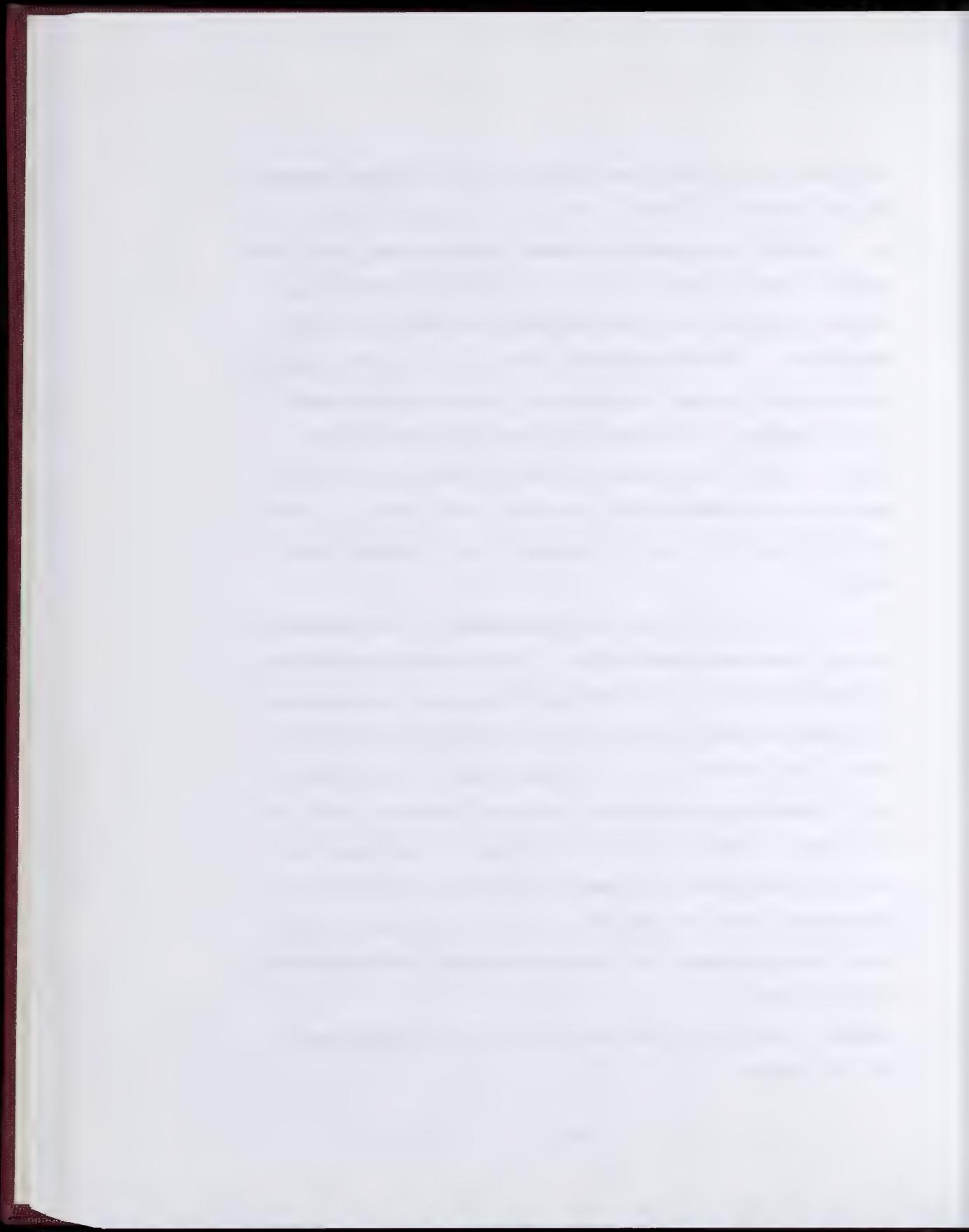
I think he was very pleased, and I know that the Asia Society was pleased, to get the collection. I think it's generally agreed that it's a very special assemblage of Indian, Southeast Asian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese art, just as the Cleveland Museum of Art is. And there are any number of things in Cleveland that-- For example, one thing, the Ch'eng-hua blue and white palace bowl,



which was one of the great porcelains of the Ming dynasty, was at auction in London. We bid on it but we didn't get it. Then Mr. Rockefeller stepped in and bought it at the auction, and he gave it to us. He gave the difference between what our final bid had been and what the final result was. About 50 percent of the price of the piece he donated, and it came to Cleveland. He was scrupulously fair in things. Of course, he sometimes didn't take my advice. There were occasions when he just didn't really want to buy something and I was very keen about it. Then these things wound up in Cleveland. So it worked both ways.

It certainly helped the development of the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. That plus the collecting, in Cleveland itself, of Greta and Severance Millikin and [A.] Dean and Geenie [Wade] Perry and George Bickford in Indian art and Kelvin Smith in Japanese or Far Eastern art. Those people also were active at the same time. So, in effect, we really were controlling and were able to pick what we wanted from the art market and with a lot of cooperation from the dealers, because they knew it was in their best interest. So it was accidental and fortuitous, but it worked out.

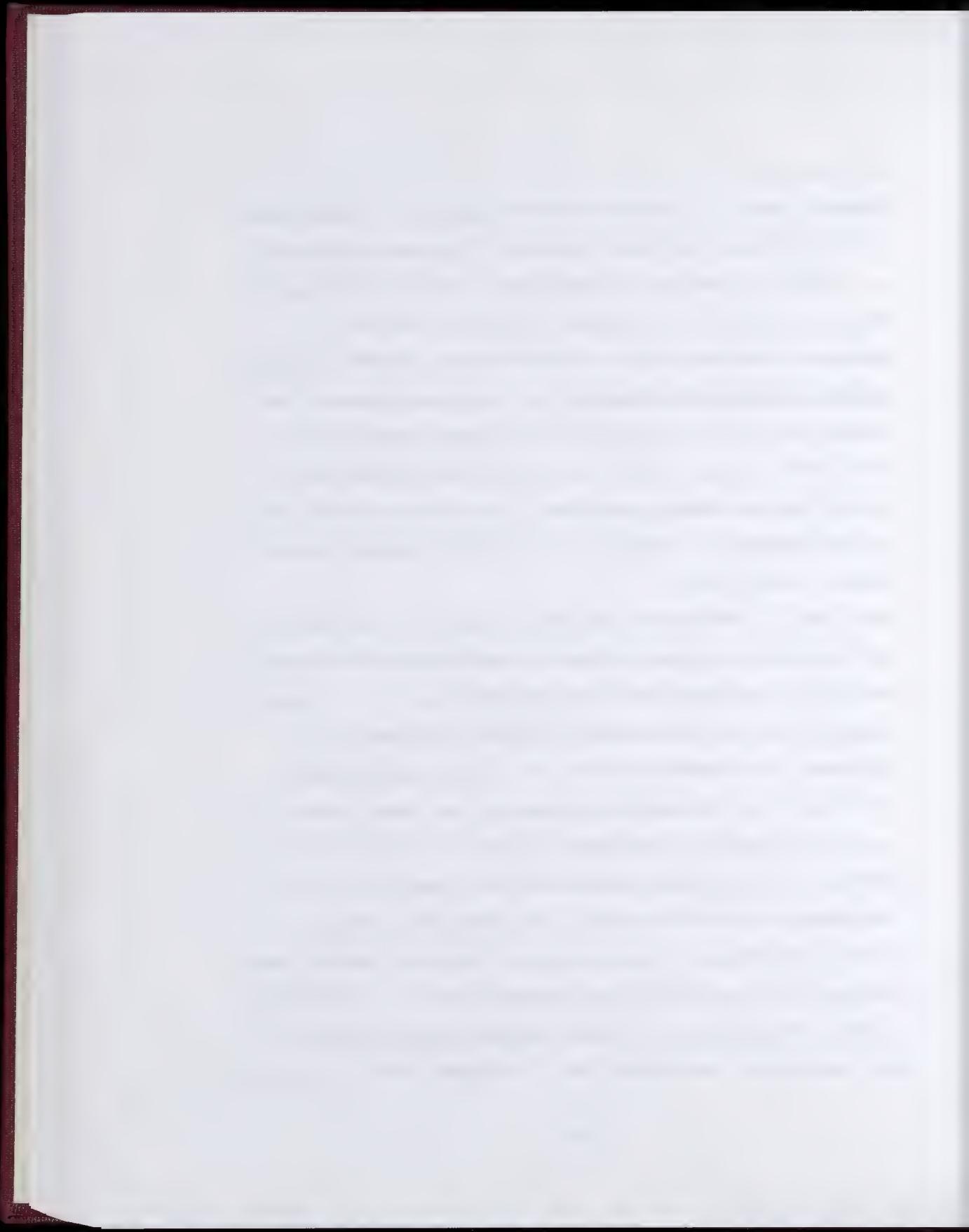
GARDNER: Well, shall we move on to your publications?
Are you ready?



LEE: Oh, yes.

GARDNER: Okay. I have them chronologically, though there will be overlap, and where there is, I'm sure you'll tell me. The first one that I have down-- And I'm ignoring the things published--the articles and so on that we discussed--before you got to the museum-- In 1954, you did Chinese Landscape Painting for the Cleveland Museum. We talked about that a little bit. Is there anything else you'd like to say? One of the things that struck me, in one of the half dozen books that I was able to track down, was the emphasis on style and on [Henri] Focillon, which recurs later as well.

LEE: Well, I definitely was brought up in a tradition of believing that art was primarily a matter of quality and sensibility and that style and the handling of the visual elements are the quintessential things that make art different from something else. As a young person just starting out at the age of eighteen or so, when I was a junior or a senior in college, all the younger, more alert members of the various departments were reading people like Roger Fry and Clive Bell, and there was a French writer, Élie Faure. During the war, Focillon came to Yale and published his Wittenborn [Schultz] series on documents of art. The title of the book was The Life of Forms in Art, and one of the essays that I remember best was called



"In Praise of Hands."

Tommy [Thomas] Munro, of course, was a Scotch philosopher, pragmatist, pupil of John Dewey and scientific in his approach. He divided the work of art into four parts, which were: (1) Functional elements such as a carpet or a bowl. (2) Narrative, representational elements. What's represented? What is the story? What is the narrative? In a portrait, what do people look like? And so forth. (3) The symbolic, or expository elements which involve symbolism, where things stand for other things and for concepts, iconography, etc. (4) Aesthetic, or he sometimes used the word "decorative," elements, which involved visual imagery. All of these were important, but the thing that was distinctive about visual arts was the visual art part of it. That, of course, was adding something to what Fry and Bell wrote about significant form and visual analysis. Tommy also had been at the Barnes Foundation, and so he had a strong interest in the analysis of the aesthetic elements of works of art. So that was part of my background.

It seemed to me clear that art can have many elements--and if you ignore those, you're doing it a disservice--but, nevertheless, the thing that makes art art is the visual side. The thing that makes music music is the auditory side, and so on. What's the old, famous--?

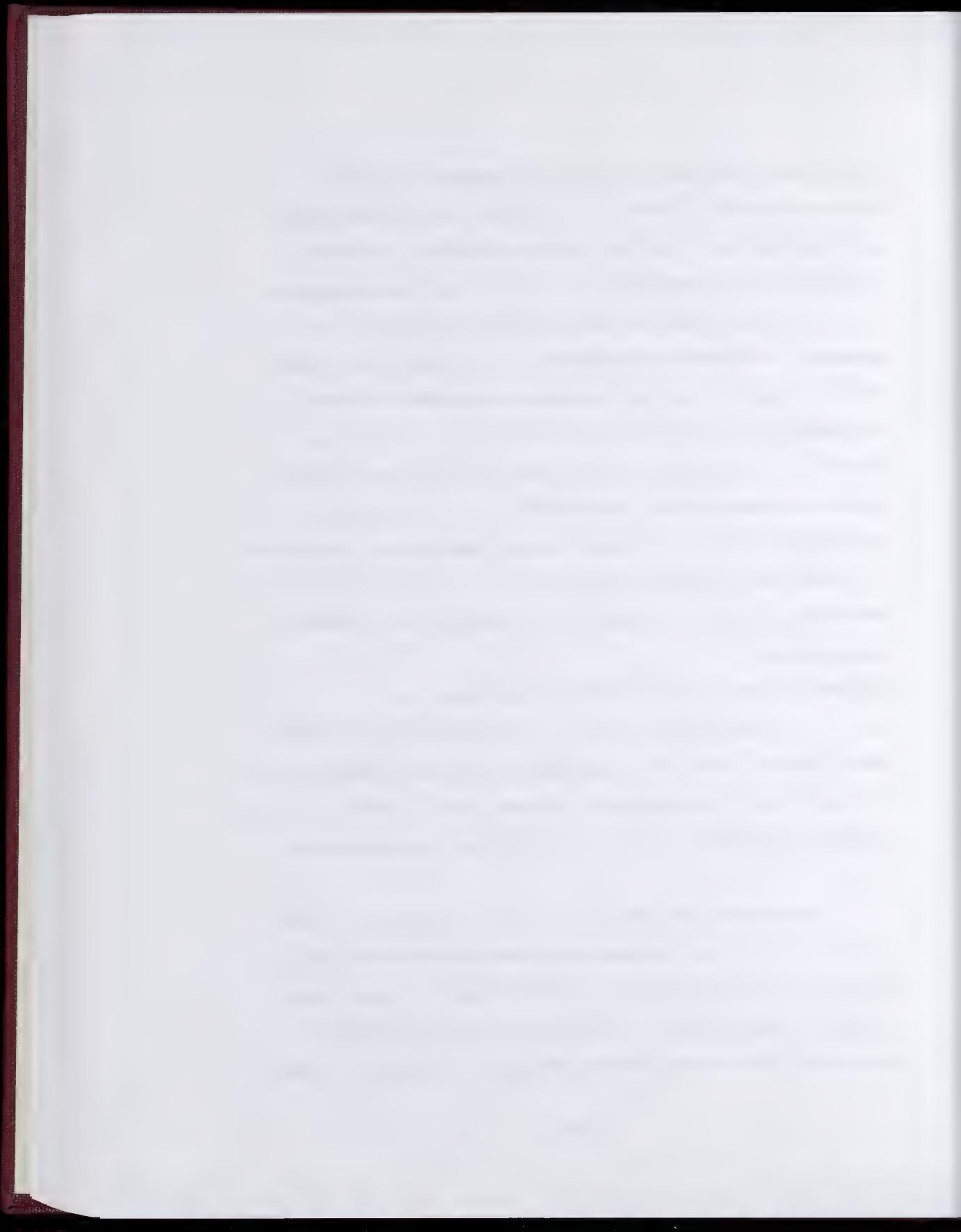


Faith, hope, and charity, and the greatest of these is charity, right? I don't know whether that is the right quotation or not. But all these things are involved in the work of art--exposition, utility, and symbolism--but it's the visual side and the connoisseurship that is necessary in order to understand that visual side-- And Focillon was, to me, the most articulate and telling representative of that point of view, just as [Erwin] Panofsky, for example, was the most eloquent and telling from the standpoint of iconography. So that clearly influenced my mind-set from the very beginning. There was a period when I was very much under the influence of Howard Hollis and, through him, of people like [Ananda] Coomaraswamy--

GARDNER: Right. We've talked about that one.

LEE: --and that kind of thing, which I gradually began-- thank God--to shuck off, because it was both unhealthy and not very nice. It ultimately played into, I think, a very totalitarian point of view. So that has always been my forte.

I'm terrible at languages, and I started very late anyhow. I was able to pass my German examination for my Ph.D. by a special sort of a cram course in German that I worked at very hard and I finally was able to do it. I had a sort of average understanding of French and I could



read it well and I could get along in utilitarian conversation or artistic, art history conversation. But you throw me into a French dinner party where idiomatic French is going all over the place and I'm pretty much at sea. Ruth and I married early. We began to have a family fairly early and so forth. We had no fortune of our own. Neither of our families had any money. We had to work. We had to get out there and do it and get it done at a time also when-- I first began to study art history, really, in 1937, '38. You weren't traveling to Europe and the Orient at that time and you weren't doing anything for about ten years. So the circumstances, plus my really bad tin ear, meant that in language I was very, very poor, especially for the oriental things that I wanted to go into so much. But I persuaded myself--and I'm glad I did, right or wrong--that there was plenty to do with European languages on oriental art to be able to be useful and to make a contribution in the field of oriental art.

I never pretended to be anything other than a connoisseur and a kind of-- Well, the ideal way to put it is the way the French put it, which is what they called haut vulgarisation. That really was my aim in what I would try to do. Also, I really studied very hard the original works of art. I did not spend my time, all my time, in documents and in the printed word. When I had



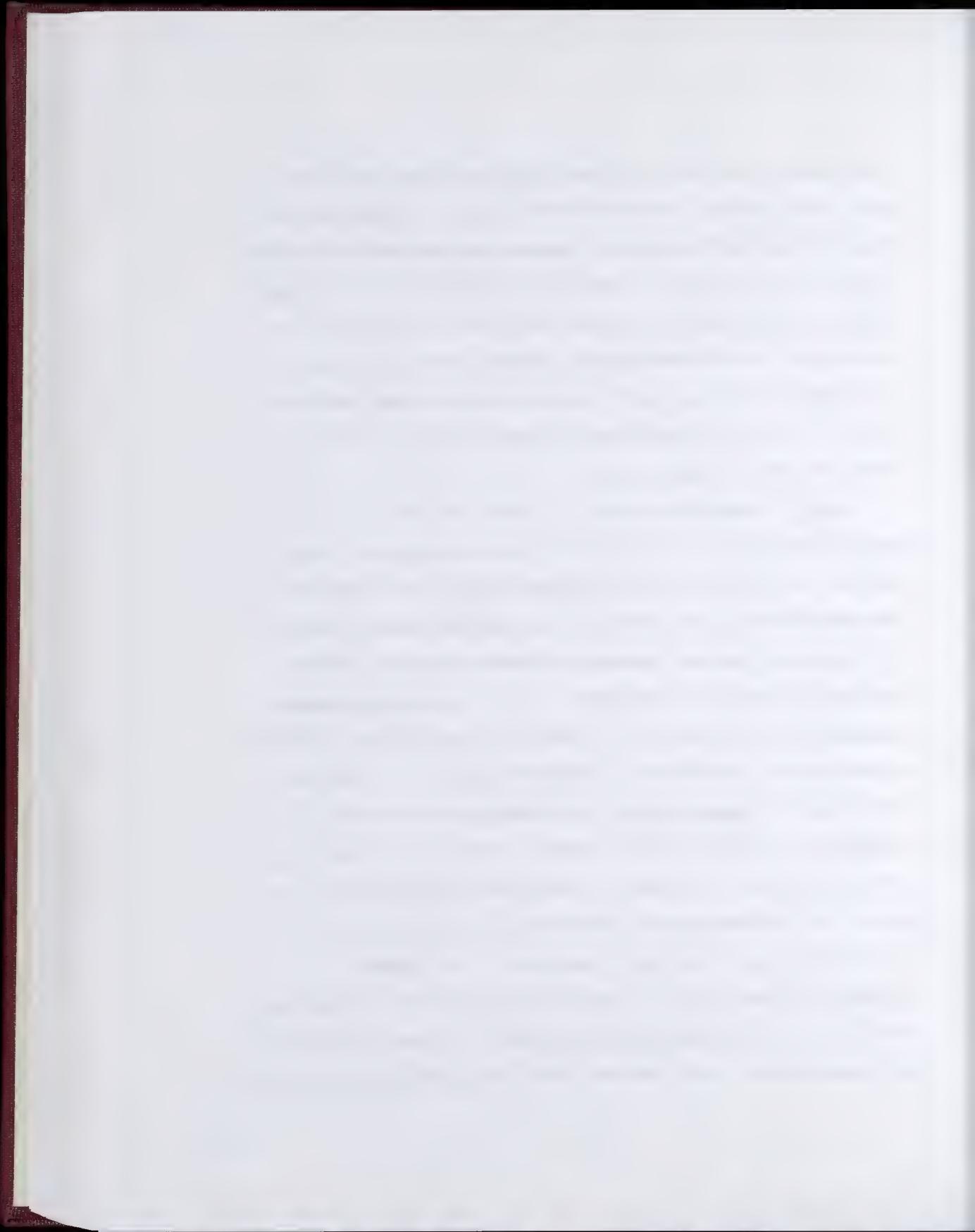
the opportunity in Japan, I saw everything I possibly could. I've gone to all the museums all over the world, with certain exceptions. I've always thought the original work of art is the thing that you have to be most familiar with and most concerned about. And over the years, I didn't learn by taking courses in oriental art. I had work programs with Howard Hollis, I read a lot. But basically, I looked and looked and looked, and particularly the people who taught me the most were people like curators or dealers. The dealers are very, very, very instructive, and some of them are extremely instructive. One Japanese dealer, Setsu, taught me an awful lot, though he didn't have any English and I had a minimum sort of-- We could just barely make ourselves understood. But he taught me an awful lot. Then there were people like Larry [Laurence] Sickman in Kansas City, when I did get out there. I was inhibited about him for years because Howard Hollis didn't like him. As a matter of fact, Howard called a lot of the stuff at [the Nelson Gallery of Art] Kansas City, some of their greatest materials-- He thought they were forgeries.

Until I broke loose from that sort of Coomaraswamy traditional viewpoint-- Coomaraswamy wrote an essay once called "The Medieval or True Society," the idea that a theocracy, basically, is the ideal form of society.



Coomaraswamy was very antidemocratic and said some really quite awful things, and the books people recommended were people like René Guénon and Jacques Maritain and a book on Tibet by Marco Pallis. And you go back and look at these things and you wonder how they could have gotten by. But it was part of an intellectual climate that was mixed up with totalitarianism, with the Hitlerian system and with Franco. It's that totalitarian point of view, which was rather strong in some areas.

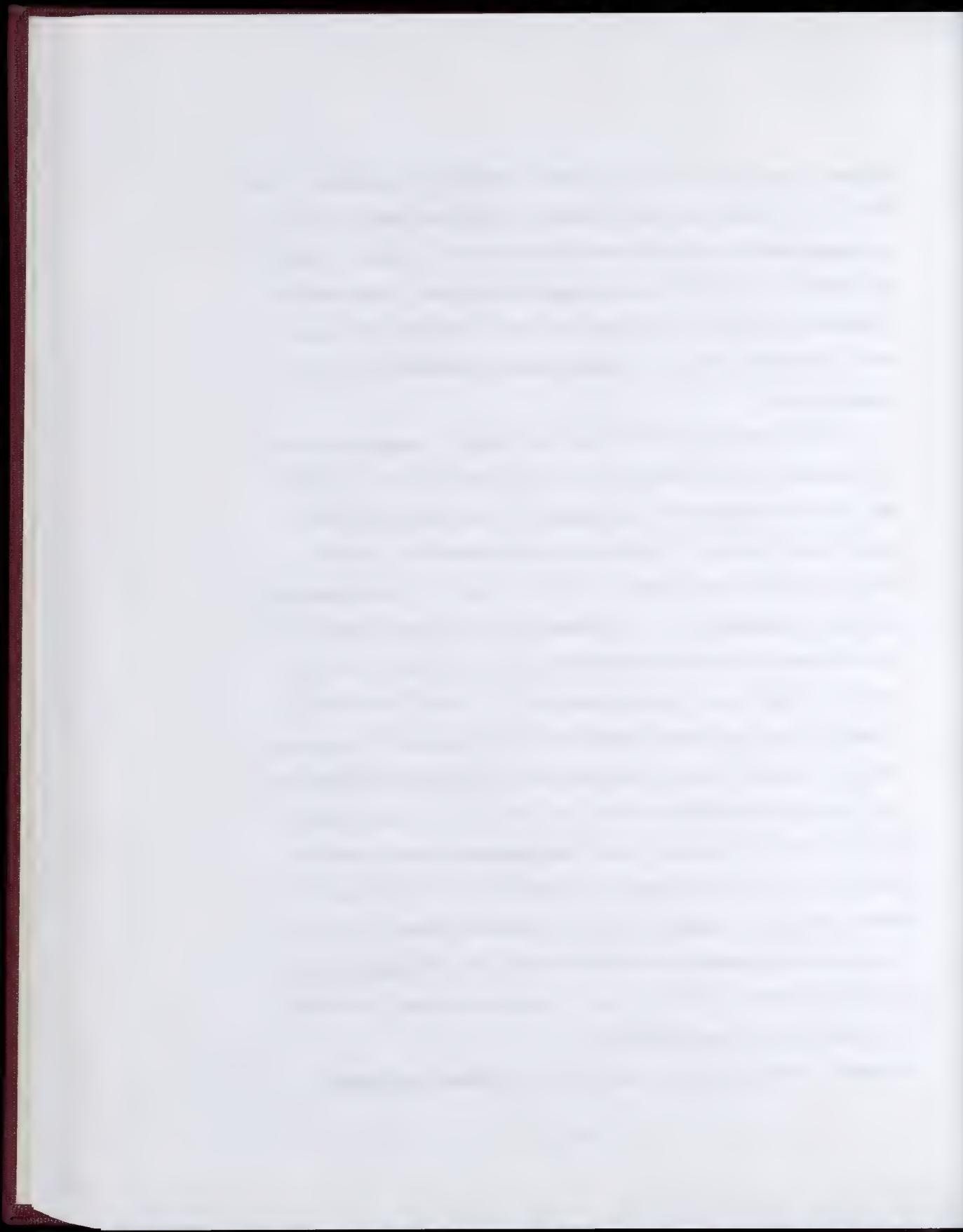
Well, I finally grew up. I think it was in Japan. When I began to actually see what was going on in Japan and see the art in Japan--the museums and the collectors and the dealers--the dominance and the paramount position of the object became increasingly more important to me. And that's what it's been ever since. Chinese Landscape Painting was not the first. The first exhibition I did on my own was an exhibition in Detroit called--I think we mentioned it--Buddhist Art, the first exhibition of Buddhist art. And it was a small effort, but it was there. At that time when I wrote about the Orient, I put out a lot of these things about the oriental or true civilization and theology, theocracy. Jim [James Marshall] Plumer, when I took two courses with him at the University of Michigan graduate school, he was a disciple of Coomaraswamy, too. He was very much interested in folk



art and that kind of thing, that particular syndrome. But once I hit Japan and that extraordinary aesthetic culture in Japan and then I got into Seattle [Art Museum], where I was working hard and developing collections, and then in Cleveland, it was-- All that earlier interest was gone, and I concentrated on a connoisseur's approach to Far Eastern art.

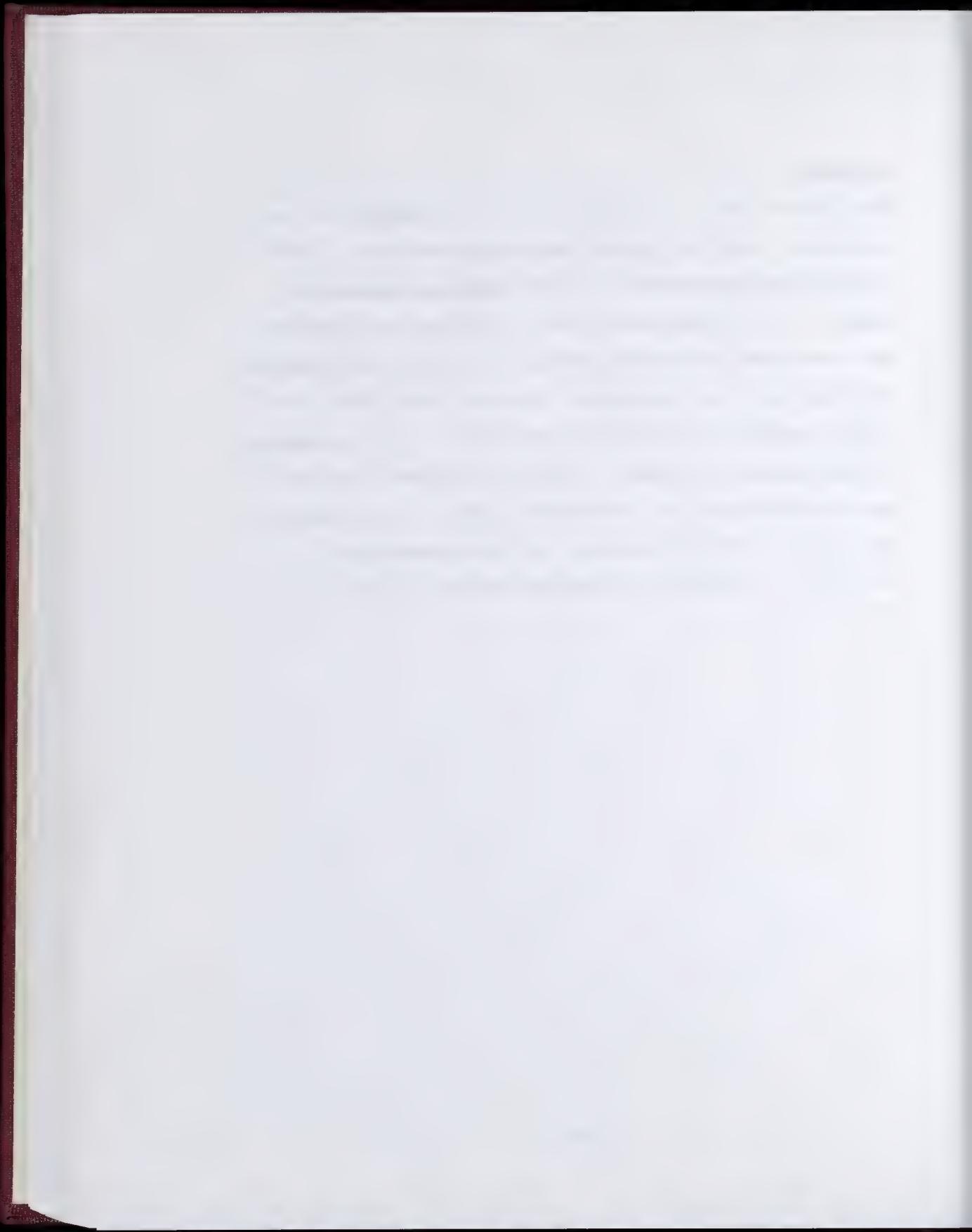
I've always believed that you have a responsibility to persuade and to educate and elucidate so that people can come to understand and share in the appreciation of great works of art. As far as I'm concerned, that's what's-- We've never made a lot of money. I was asked on several occasions-- C. T. [Ching-tsi] Loo asked me to go in with him as a dealer and Howard Hollis wanted me to, and I wouldn't even think about it. I still feel very strongly that you have an educational responsibility and that if someone doesn't write books or write articles and try to explain works of art, the scholars by and large will not do it, because they are pursuing their agenda, which is quite right and which builds the foundation for other things to happen. But if somebody doesn't act as an intermediary between the work of art and the people who don't know about works of art, no one is going to do it. I think it's a responsibility.

GARDNER: What was the reaction to Chinese Landscape



Painting?

LEE: Pretty good. It was positive. The exhibition was successful, and, as I said, the catalog went well. Dover Press issued paperbacks of it and Japanese Decorative Style. So it's been used a lot. All those publications that developed out of the museum, all of the royalties and all, that went to the museum. The only thing that I got really substantial, well, any royalties from was A History of Far Eastern Art [1964], which I wrote over a period of years, starting at the university-- When I was in Seattle and I was an adjunct professor at the University of Washington, it grew out of my introductory course.

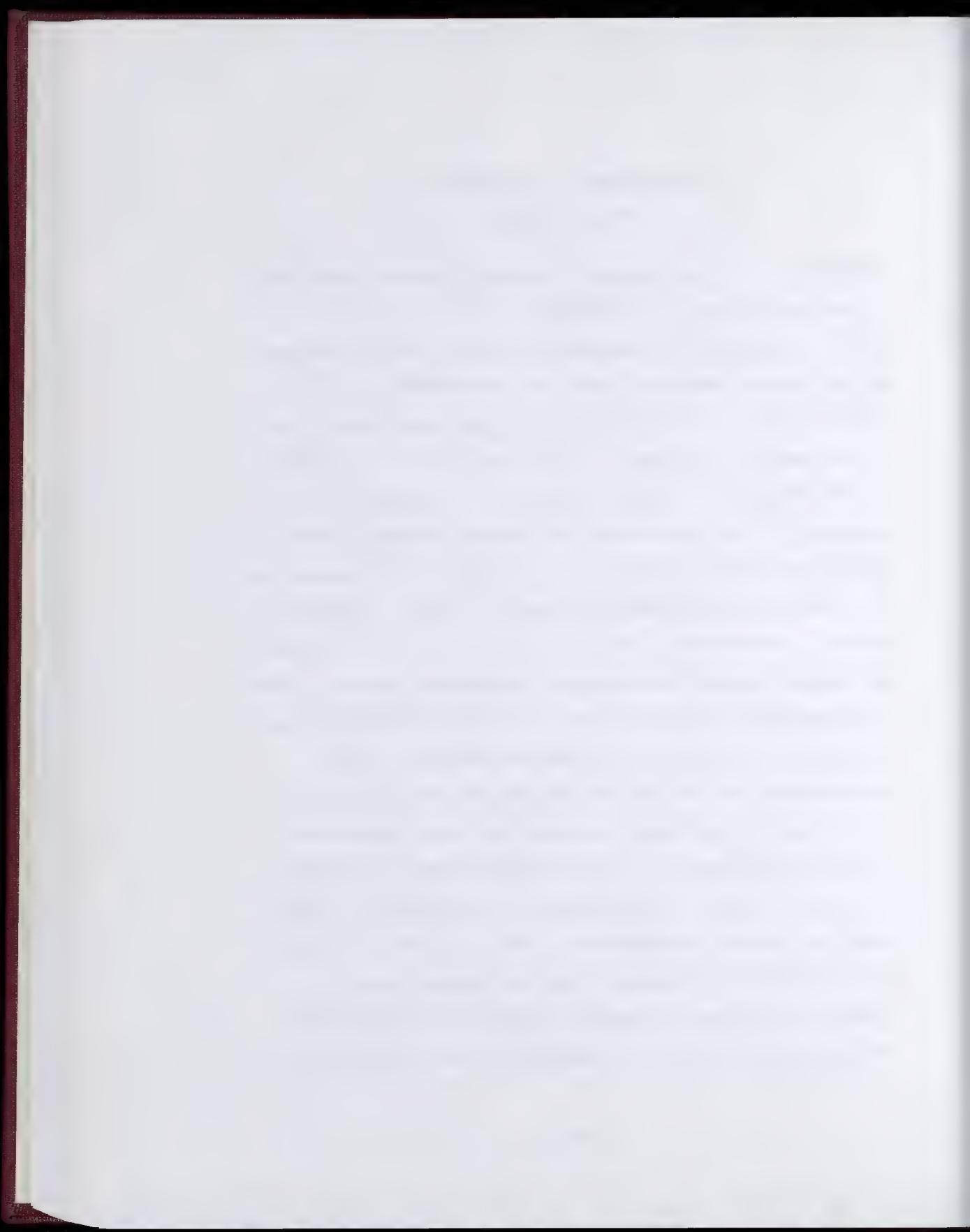


TAPE NUMBER: XI, SIDE ONE

JULY 15, 1992

GARDNER: As we were turning the tape, you mentioned that it was twelve years in the making?

LEE: A History of Far Eastern Art [1964] was twelve years in the making, beginning with the introductory courses that I taught at the University of Washington when I was at the Seattle Art Museum. There was no text for history of Far Eastern art. There were texts on Chinese art, on Japanese art, on Indian art, but almost nothing, except in French, on Southeast Asian art. In particular, because of the importance of Buddhism in Eastern Asia-- If you gave a course in Chinese art, you always had to go back to India and explain about the coming of Buddhism to China. It was very important in Japan as well. So it seemed to me that it was very important that there be some kind of an introductory text to the art of Eastern Asia that would follow the international movements and also follow the national developments. Certain aspects were international and certain aspects were national, and one had to take this into account in preparing a text, to use the whole area and show the interrelationships where those interrelations were paramount. There was no such book. That's the way I taught my course and that's the way I

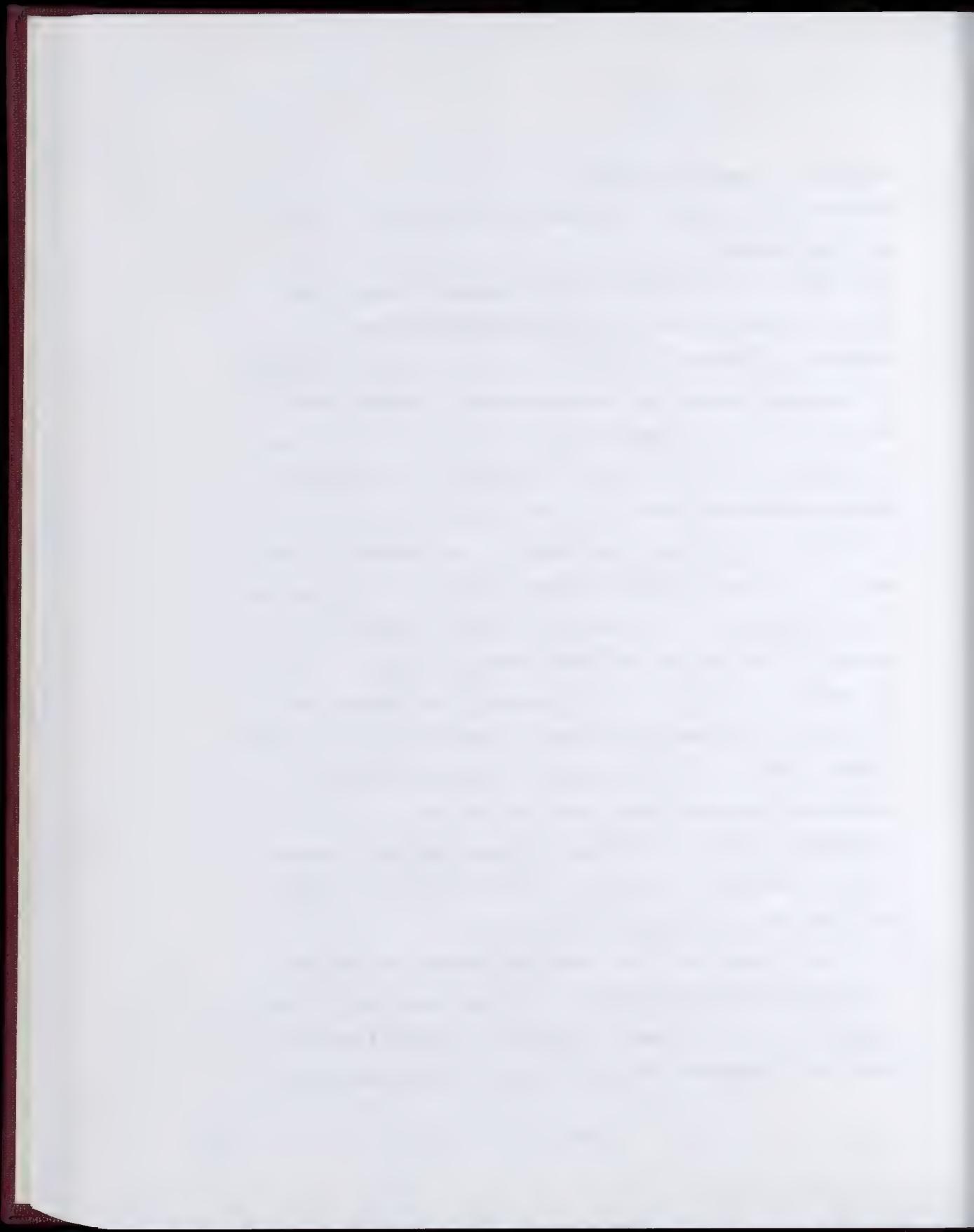


started to organize the text.

GARDNER: Did [Harry N.] Abrams [Inc.] find you? Or did you find Abrams?

LEE: Well, that was serendipity, because-- When I had been a graduate student in Cleveland and had been a volunteer assistant to Howard [C.] Hollis, Milton Fox was the assistant curator of education under [Thomas] Munro. He was an artist, an extraordinary man, a live wire, very intelligent and very active. He was very, very liberal. Whereas Howard Hollis was very reactionary politically, Milton was very liberal politically. As a matter of fact, each of them used to take me aside and say, "You've got to be very careful." You would get, "You're going to be in trouble if you keep on with that other guy there." Milton the radical or Howard the reactionary. But during the war, Milton went west and he was in camouflage in the army I guess. Then he got interested in the movies out in California and he did some work, but not very successfully, there. And then he became editor at Harry Abrams in New York. He was the first editor for Abrams. So I knew him very well and I liked him.

When I told him I was doing this thing, he was very interested right away and they said they would do it. As a matter of fact, it was very funny, because Milton was also a fly fisherman, and when I got to where the thing



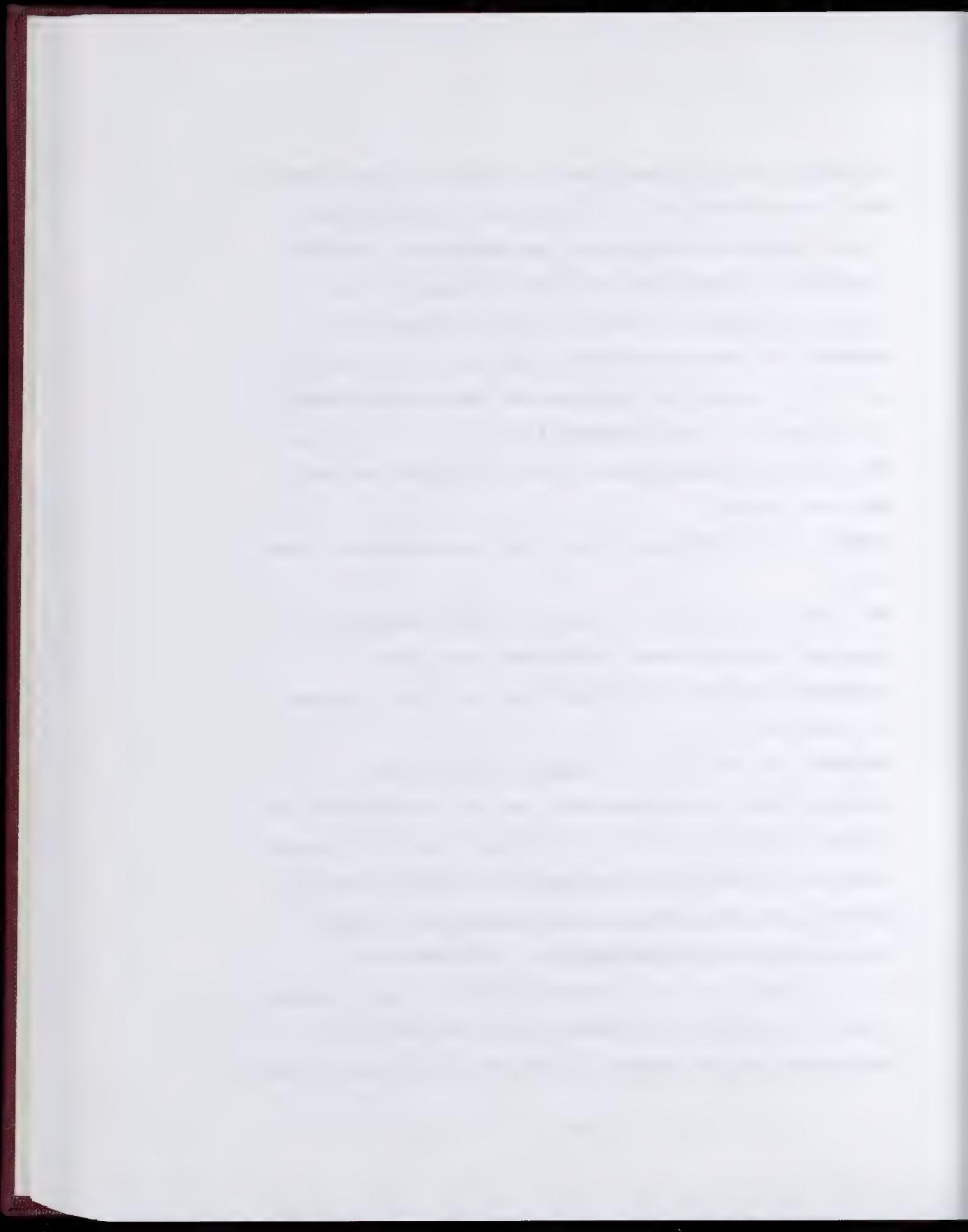
was almost done but there were all kinds of loose ends and badly phrased sections and this, that, and the other thing, we had a session up in the Adirondacks with Ruth [Ward Lee] and Ruby Fox, his wife, and some of the children up there in a cabin up in the Adirondacks. I remember we just worked almost eighteen hours a day for a week to try to get the thing pulled together and ready to go to press. We had a wonderful time up there. Milton was an extraordinary person. And it's worked out very well ever since.

GARDNER: Four editions, then? The fourth about to come out?

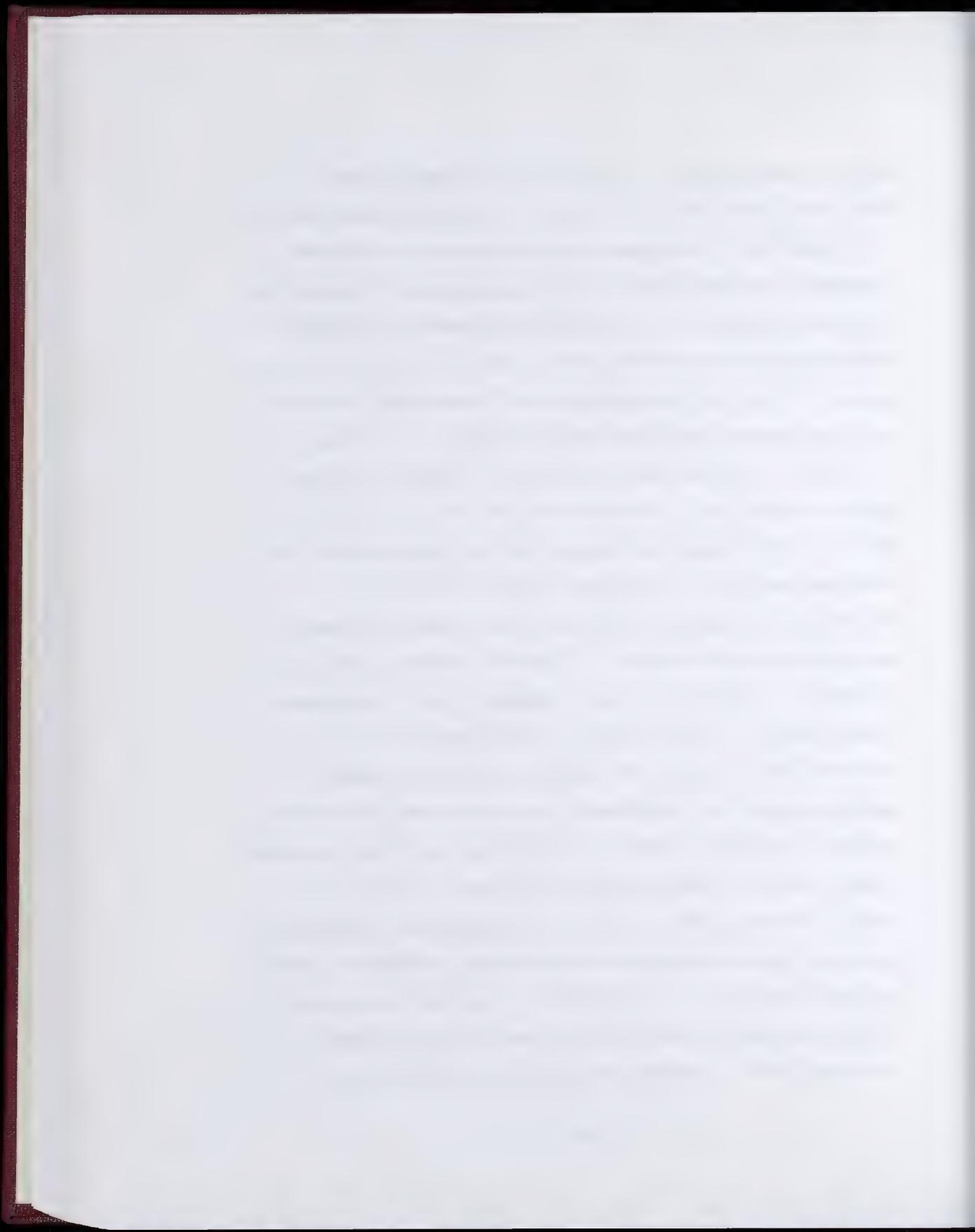
LEE: There were four editions. The fifth edition is scheduled to go to press in October. And it's a thoroughly revised and enlarged edition. Just finished the other day.

GARDNER: Oh, really! Oh, congratulations! Okay, I'd better go back to my chronology, and you can comment again as much as you like about any of these. In 1955, you did something called Streams and Mountains without End: [A Northern Sung Handscroll and Its Significance in the History of Early Chinese Painting], with Wen Fong.

LEE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Despite the fact that I'm not a great scholar, we've done some things that are firsts. The History of Far Eastern Art was the first text for the



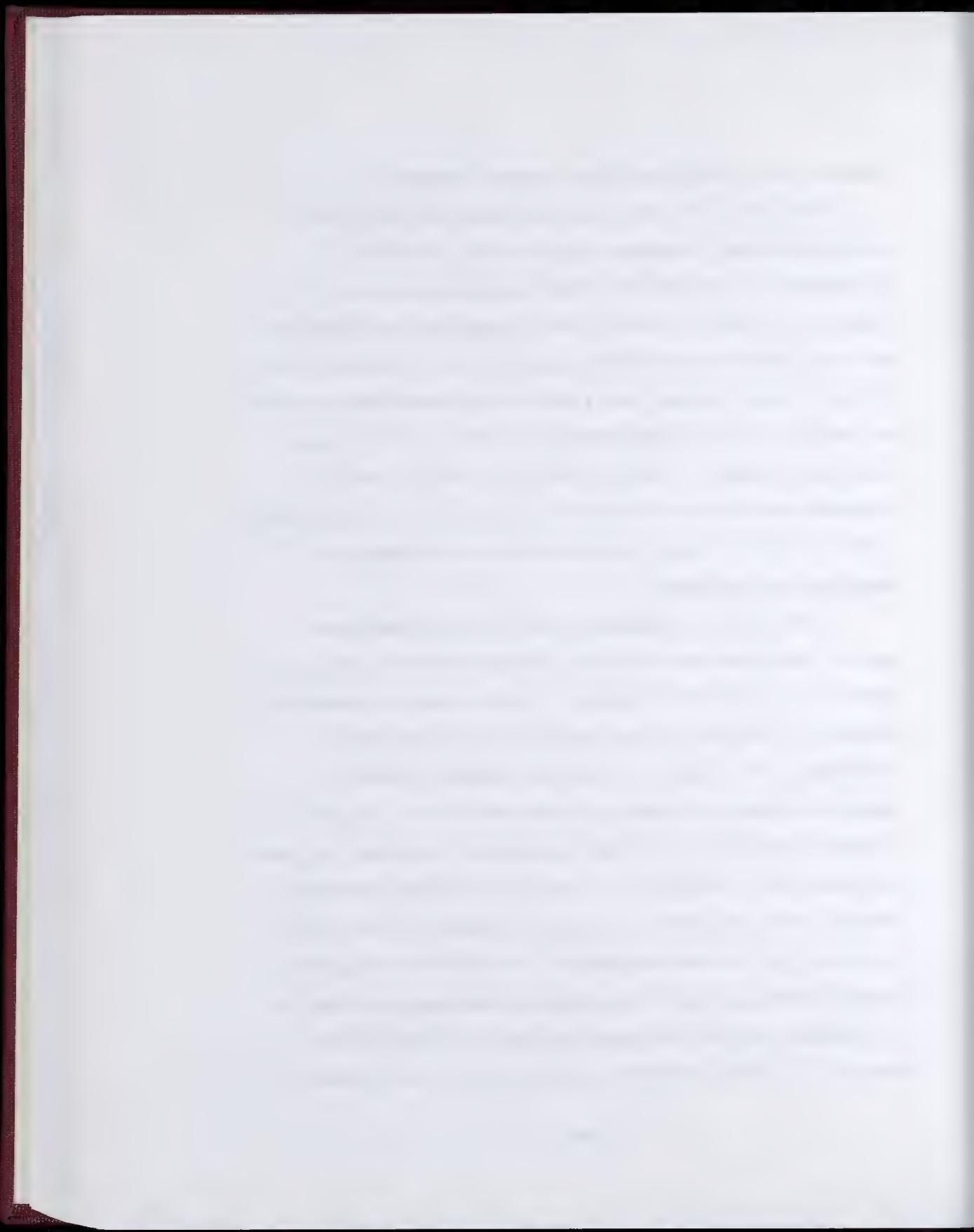
whole of Eastern Asia. I bought for Cleveland when I first came here, the second year I was here--thank Leonard [C.] Hanna [Jr.], who gave the money for it--a Chinese landscape handscroll called Chi Chan Wu Chin, "Streams and Mountains without End" or "Endless Streams and Mountains." A painting of the twelfth century that we were very lucky to get. I got it from a very--what's the word I want?--peculiar dealer named [Walter] Hochstadter, a German, who was a case. He was one of these very, very picky, neat, precise types, and it would drive you crazy to watch him do all these things, the rituals he had to go through to show you something. So anyhow, Walter first had a painting he showed me which was a very famous handscroll and which was spectacular. I took it home on approval and studied it in Cleveland, and I decided that it was later, a copy, which I still believe. So I took it back to him and explained. I had told Leonard Hanna and Leonard agreed to give it. And then I had to go back to Leonard and say, "Leonard, I think the painting is a Ming copy and I don't think we should get it." He said, "All right. Fine." So then I took it back to Hochstadter, and after a moment of shock and all kinds of things, he agreed. Then he said, "Would you be interested in another handscroll?" He went out and pulled out this one, which was super. So we bought that. Leonard magnanimously trusted this



judgment that had failed once, and we bought it.

Then I was introduced to Wen Fong, who was then a graduate student finishing his Ph.D. at Princeton [University]. He had come from Shanghai and was a wunderkind. He had studied calligraphy and painting and was very famous for his calligraphy. And I thought that-- I didn't know Chinese, and I certainly needed help anyhow. He came and didn't have anything to do and didn't have anyplace to stay. So we invited him, and he came to Cleveland and stayed with us at our house for most of the summer of '53, I think, and we worked on Streams and Mountains without End.

I wanted to do something that had not been done before, and that was to study a single painting in great depth, as a kind of monograph. Perhaps over a period of decades, if various people would do this with various paintings, we'd begin to build the corpus of well-researched and solid materials for standards. So Wen and I worked very hard all summer and we got it done. It was published as a monograph in the Artibus Asiae monograph series. Not long after, some others began to come out. Chu-tsing Li did two monographs: one on Chao Meng-fu's Autumn Colors of the Chiao and Hua Mountains and then he did another one on the Sheep and Goat picture by Chao Meng-fu. I think it made a contribution, and it also, in



terms of methodology, combined the elements of connoisseurship with a thorough analysis of seals and inscriptions and ownership and so on. I'm glad we did it. I think it was a useful thing.

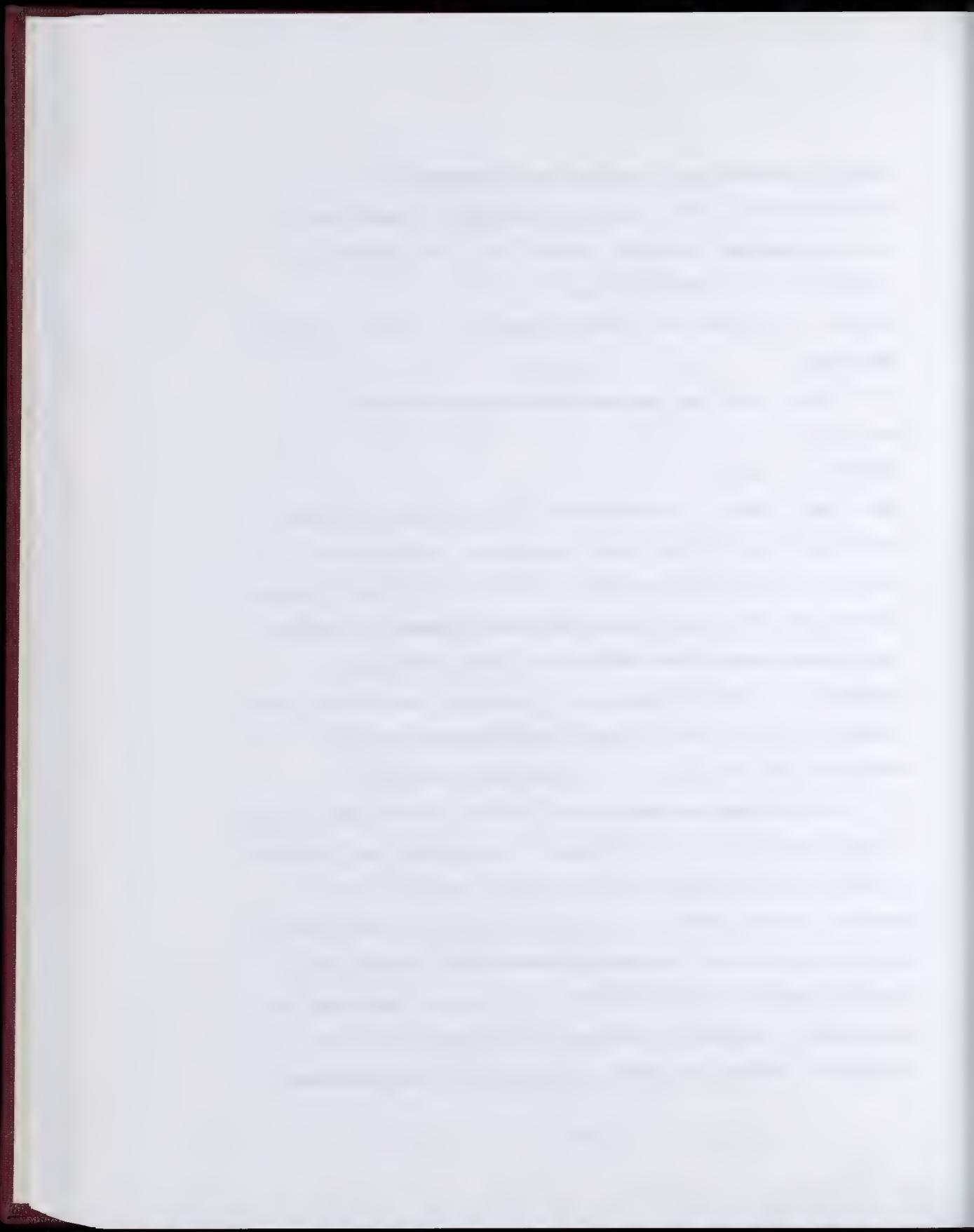
GARDNER: The next one I have on my list is 1960. Rajput Painting?

LEE: Well, that was the Asia Society exhibition, I believe.

GARDNER: I see.

LEE: Yes. Well, I've always been interested in Rajput painting. When I first went to Detroit [Institute of Arts], I had a little exhibition with no catalog of Rajput painting at the Alger House, the branch museum of Italian Renaissance decorative arts there. They were very inexpensive. Boston Museum [of Fine Arts] had a very fine large collection that [Ananda] Coomaraswamy had put together, but they weren't terribly well known.

The Asia Society was always looking around and trying to get people to do exhibitions. I suggested that they do an exhibition on Rajput painting and I would do the catalog, which I did. It was back in the days when Rajput painting was not as thoroughly known as it is now and where it was mistakenly simpler, in terms of geography in particular, because of the exact locations of all the different schools of painting depending on the patronage



of the local rajas. That had not been thoroughly explored. So it was an introductory exhibition and catalog and one which has been superseded by subsequent research by a lot of people who had been working in that area.

GARDNER: The next one was Japanese Decorative Style [1961], which we've talked about.

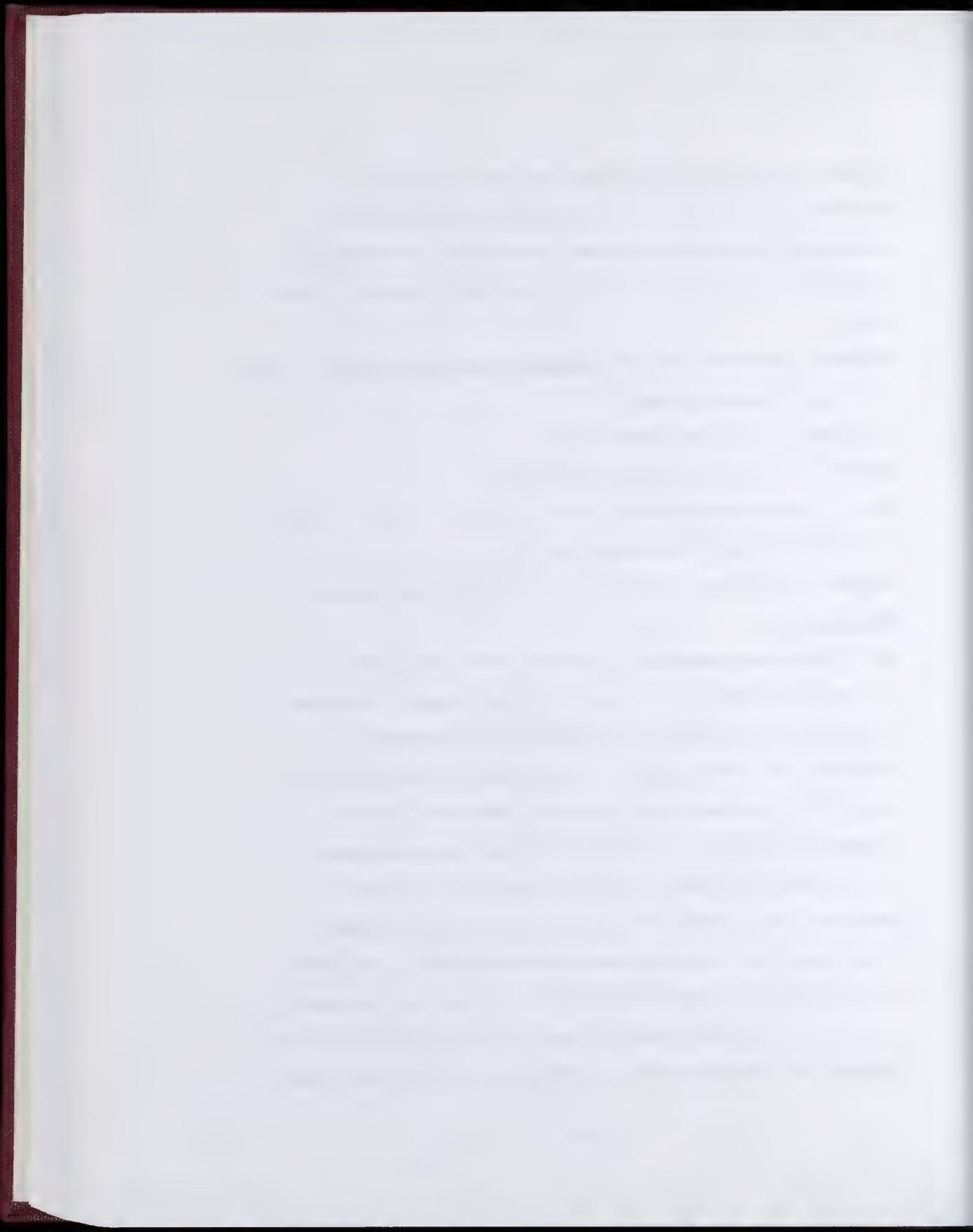
LEE: Yes, we talked about that.

GARDNER: Do you have anything to add?

LEE: I don't think there's much to add to that. I think what I said there takes care of it.

GARDNER: And then in 1963 you published Tea Taste in Japanese Art.

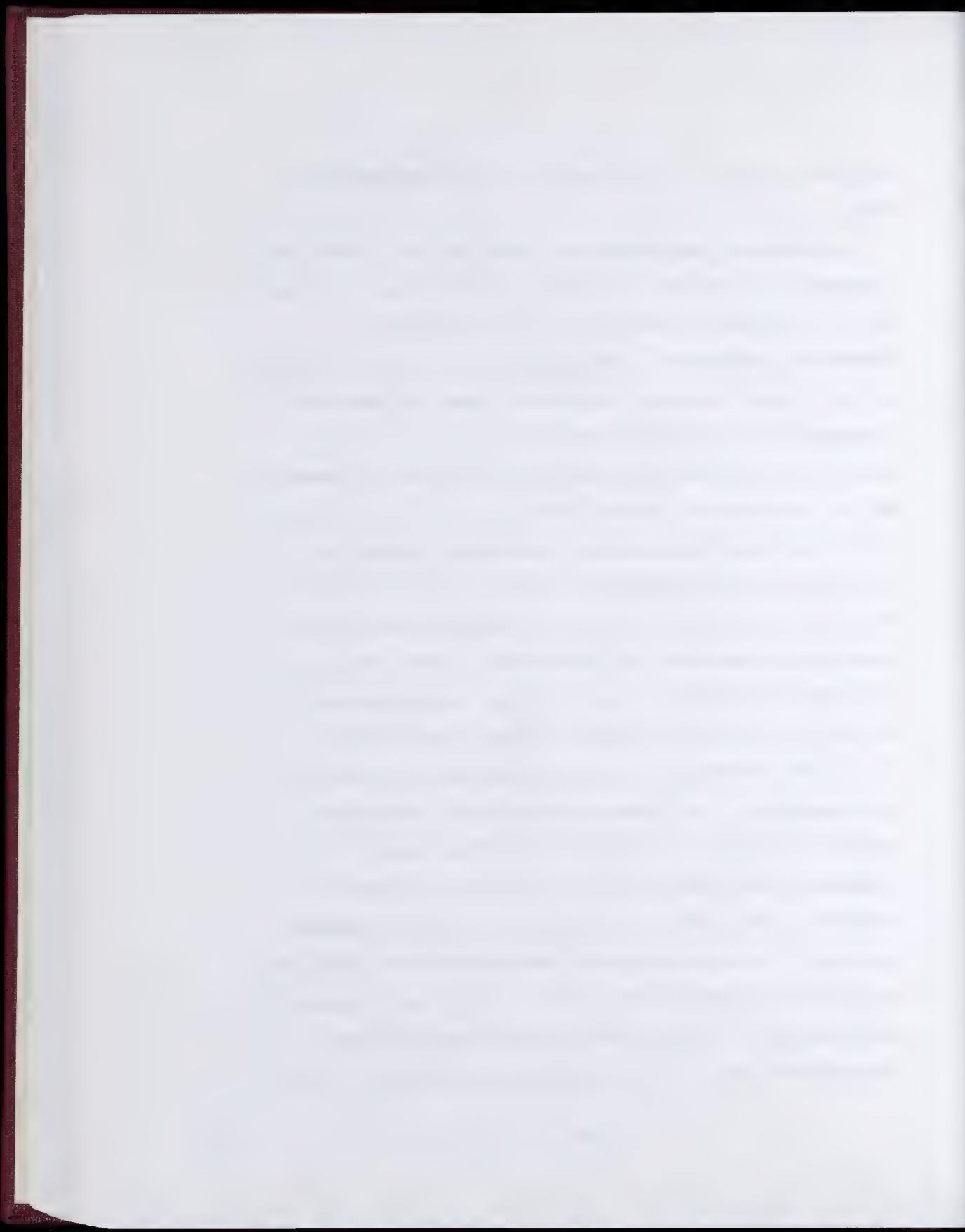
LEE: That was something I wanted to do very much, and the Asia Society liked the idea. The tea ceremony has been, as far as I'm concerned, a controversial element in Japanese art. For people to love the tea ceremony and think of it as absolutely the most important element of Japanese art always has struck me, particularly when I first lived in Japan-- It always struck me as having something very, very artificial, almost a ritualistic thing, that had long outlived its usefulness. The word got around that I was not a devotee of the tea ceremony. Also, a lot of tea ceremony types were also the types who thought that Coomaraswamy and [René] Guénon and so forth



were just terrific. They were very, very conservative types.

So the word got around in '46 to '48 that I was not impressed with the tea ceremony. I didn't like it. And two of the great old tea masters, Matsunaga and Hatakeyama, approached. Hatakeyama went to Howard Hollis and me. Howard was still there and I was his assistant. He wanted to give a tea ceremony and try to explain. He made a point of explaining the origins of the tea ceremony and its character in earlier times as a much less formal, less ritualistic gathering of like-minded people for conviviality in the exchange of ideas and also for show and tell, as collectors of things that they had gotten recently or something, and also having a meal, not just going through the green tea bit. Then Matsunaga did it the next year for me. Howard had gone into business.

I was educated by that experience and I looked at it more carefully. And I began to see also, in terms of education, that the tea ceremony and the flower arrangement business all had a very definite function in Japanese society that was lacking in almost all Western societies. That was a kind of aesthetic ritual which was shared by all, whether they knew it or not and whether they understood it or not and whether they practiced it in a persnickety way or in a generally convivial way. But it



was a kind of aesthetic glue that bound understanding of art together in that society, and it was sadly lacking, certainly, in the United States.

I wanted to do that exhibition and to-- There were books on the tea ceremony. There was a famous book by the Australian, [Arthur L.] Sadler, which tells you all you want to know and more about the tea ritual. But I wanted to do it, and I chose the title Tea Taste in Japanese Art so that it wouldn't be a book about the tea ceremony but would be an introduction to what was involved in the tea ceremony in the way of taste, in connoisseurship, and how it affected the non-tea elements around it in the Japanese culture. Anyway, it was quite successful and it is still used by a lot of people as an introductory text for understanding the influence of tea taste. So I think, again, that was a work of vulgarization but one that was very much needed because of the strictures and inhibitions and the misunderstandings that developed as part of this ritualistic, worshipping attitude towards the tea ceremony.

There are several different sects of tea ceremony. There's the Sen group in Kyoto. Then there are others, such as Omote. They are world-wide organizations, and they have a pyramidal structure. All the dues and memberships all around the world flow up to the peak of



the pyramid in Kyoto, and they are extremely profitable. The same thing is true of calligraphy societies in Japan and flower arrangement societies. They're organized. And they are self-appointed preservers of a flame. And this kind of super-worshipful and rigid attitude I think can tend to be very harmful. But the concept of a common ritual involving aesthetics is so good and so important in terms of art education, which a lot of Western people talk about, but it doesn't work out very well. I thought it was worth stressing those aspects of it.

GARDNER: Fascinating. I want to go see if I can find that one somewhere. We talked about the History of Far Eastern Art. In 1968, as a part of the exhibit program, you did Chinese Art under the Mongols: [The Art of the Yüan Dynasty, 1279-1368].

LEE: Yes. Well, we discussed that a little bit earlier. But that has proven to be, I suppose, in terms of the scholarly contribution to the field--that exhibition and that catalog, on which Wai-kam Ho was the coauthor with me--the major thing that I've been associated with in terms of scholarship. As I said earlier, the Yüan dynasty was a sort of dumping ground. We knew about the origins of the literary man's style of painting from them, but we didn't really pay much attention to the other kinds of painting of Yüan. The birth of the Chinese blue and white



tradition occurred in Yüan. It was a really seminal period, and it was under foreign rule. Wai-kam was very interested in the idea. We worked very hard at it together and we got a lot of cooperation from our colleagues in Britain, especially, because they were very much interested in it. It really was an event and people came from all over. We had visitors from Japan, from Hong Kong, from Germany, all over. People came to see that particular exhibition. And one sort of a mercenary proof of a success is that the catalog of that exhibition is now totally unattainable, and when it does appear at a bookseller's, it costs hundreds and hundreds of dollars.

GARDNER: Does it really?

LEE: Yes. Yes.

GARDNER: I hope you have twenty or thirty put aside for your old age.

LEE: No, I've only got one. And it's dog-eared.

GARDNER: That's wonderful. The same year you did a publication Ancient Cambodian Sculpture.

LEE: That was another Asia Society exhibition. I've done several--more than several--exhibitions for the Asia Society. It's a wonderful venue for a relatively small, concentrated exhibition on a subject that is not all that well known and its primary audience is an educated and sympathetic lay audience. That's my meat. Doing



exhibitions for other scholars is not as exciting to me as the other.

There had never been an exhibition of Cambodian sculpture in the United States. Ever. I don't think there'd ever been one anywhere except in Paris, where the Musée Guimet has that great collection. There were certainly a lot of very interesting and beautiful sculptures in America, and it just seemed to me that it was an opportunity to do something that hadn't been done before and introduce a lot of people to this material.

[tape recorder off]

GARDNER: At that point that you wrote that piece on ancient Cambodian sculpture, did you travel to Cambodia? Or have you traveled to Cambodia?

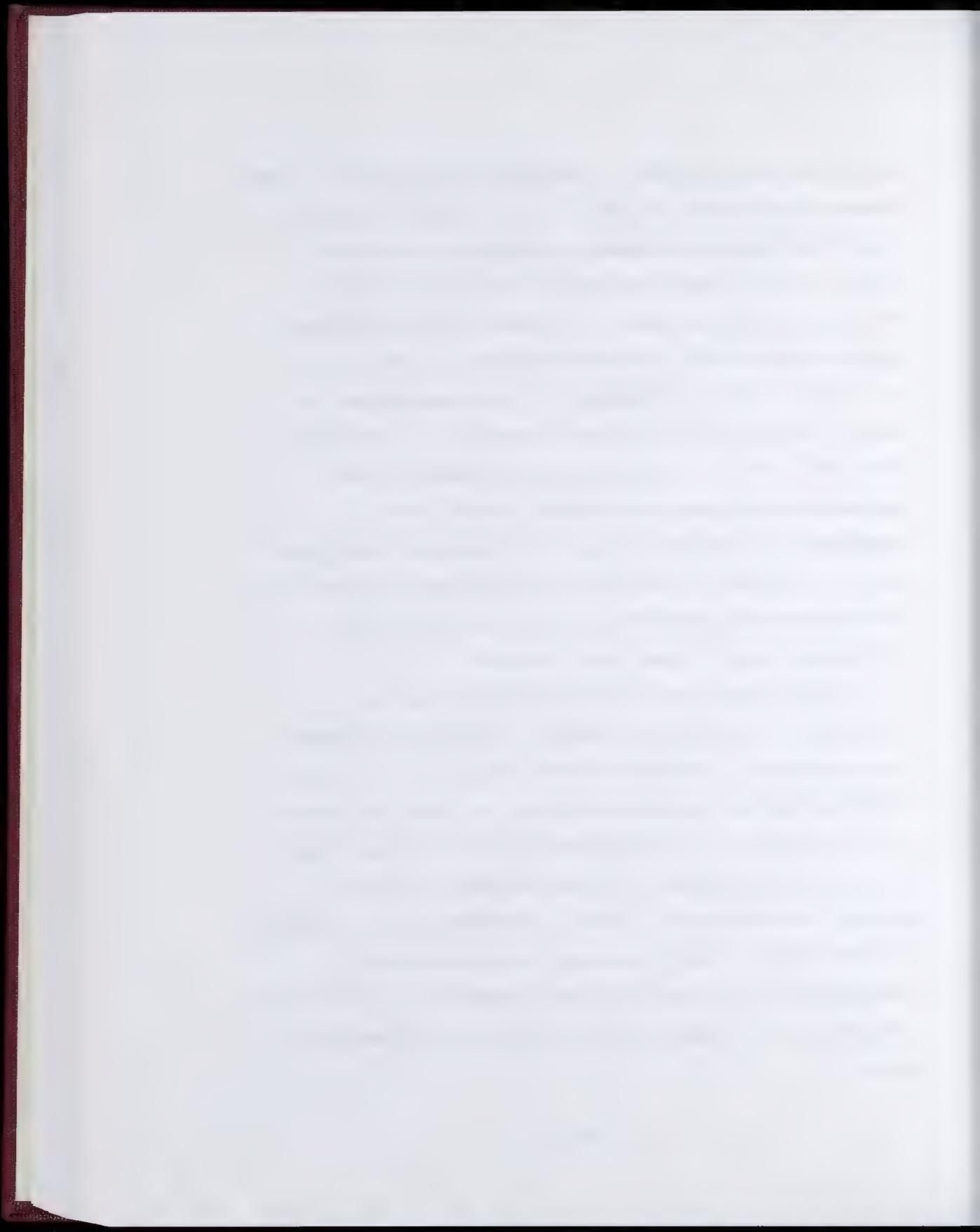
LEE: Yes. We got into Angkor just before it all closed down. We were in Bangkok. We saw some friends of ours and grabbed a plane and got a car and we were able to see quite a bit of the material in situ.

I've always been interested in Cambodian sculpture. I acquired pieces when I first went to Detroit. I bought a bronze-- Of all places, Pierre Matisse had a beautiful Cambodian bronze Garuda, a bird-beast. Paul Mallon was one of the dealers that I knew very well, from whom we bought ancient material, but he also dealt in Cambodian material and had sold a lot of the best pieces in France



and in the United States. I learned a lot from him. When I came to Cleveland, we made a point-- Howard Hollis had bought some very good Cambodian sculptures from Paul Mallon. We built more and more on that, and I think Cleveland has now probably, I suppose, the best Cambodian sculpture collection in the United States. The best in the world, outside of Cambodia, is the Musée Guimet in Paris. The British don't have a great deal. The Germans have some. But it's always been an interest of mine because it's such an extraordinary style. It's a combination of the sensuousness of Indian art, even to a point of sensuality, combined with an almost Egyptian kind of architectural character, which is an interesting combination and, I think, very beautiful.

The greatest piece of Cambodian sculpture in Cleveland, one of the two greatest in the United States, is a piece that I knew even before World War II. It had been acquired by a Belgian collector, a famous collector, in 1922 or 1923. I followed that piece and I knew there was a chance to get it. It took me twelve years to finally, finally get it. It's a fascinating story, one of the most extraordinary stories of a combination of archaeology and art and absolutely unbelievably improbable circumstances. Maybe at the end we could say something about it.

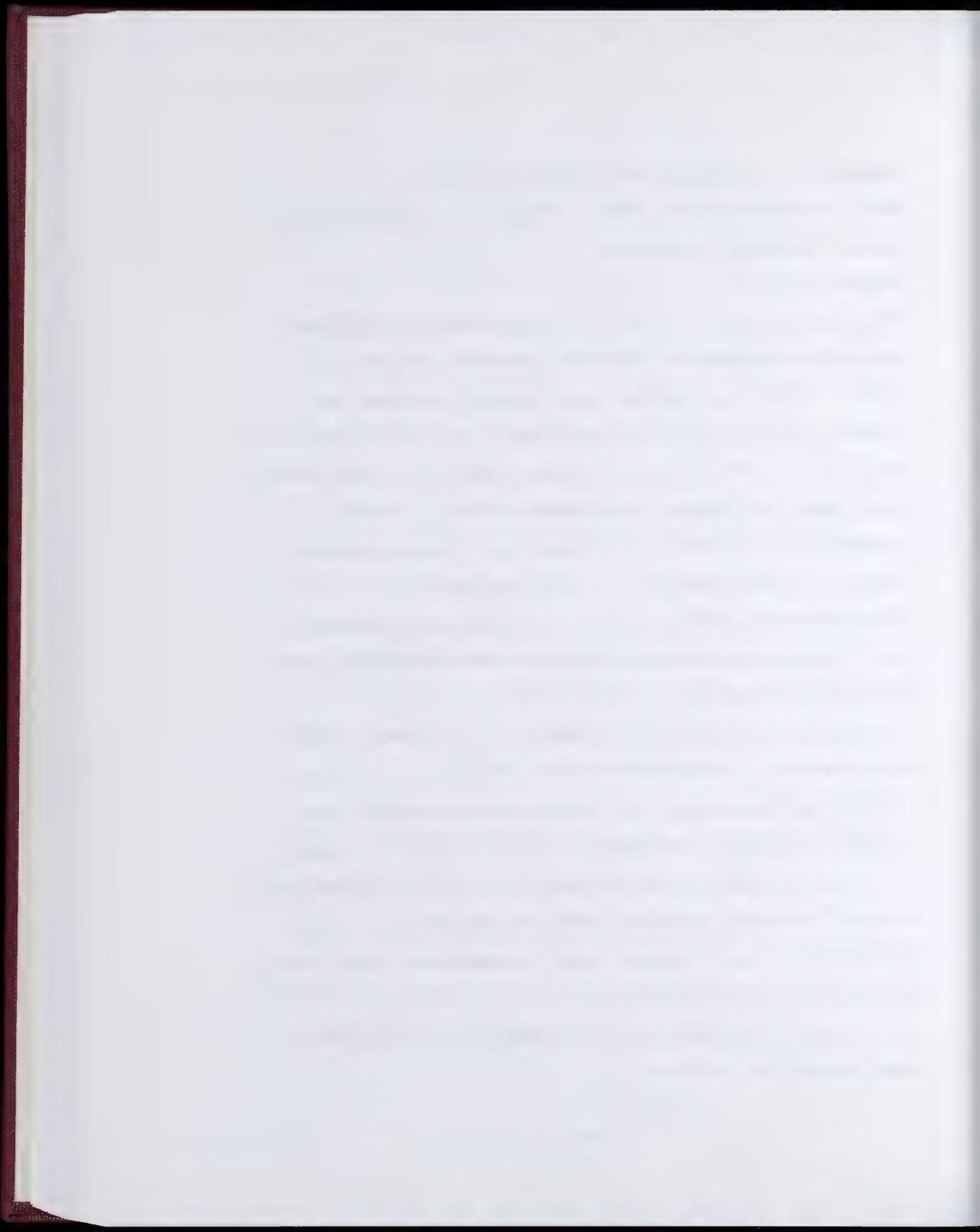


GARDNER: I'm going to make a note of that.

LEE: Or we could deal with it while we're talking about ancient Cambodian sculpture.

GARDNER: Sure.

LEE: All right. Let's do it. This piece was the most famous single piece of Cambodian sculpture in the Western world. It was acquired by Adolf Stoclet, who was the aluminum king of Europe in World War I and afterwards, and he got it in 1922 or 1923. It was a head and torso, minus arms, legs, and thighs, of Krishna holding up Mount Govardhan, one of the famous episodes in the avatars of Vishnu in Hindu cosmology. It was reproduced in Coomaraswamy's pioneering text on Indian and Indonesian art. Whenever a Cambodian sculpture was reproduced, the Stoclet piece was there. Paul Mallon, the dealer I mentioned to you, had told me about it. He had not sold it to Stoclet. Somebody else had. But he had a file on it which he showed me. It included photographs of the piece. But also, a few years after he bought the piece, the French archaeological authorities in Cambodia had dug up from the site, Phnom Da, material that they were sure belonged with that Stoclet piece, fragments of legs, arms, and sort of a supporting strut. They had sent it to him as a present, and Paul had photographs of these pieces as they arrived in Brussels.

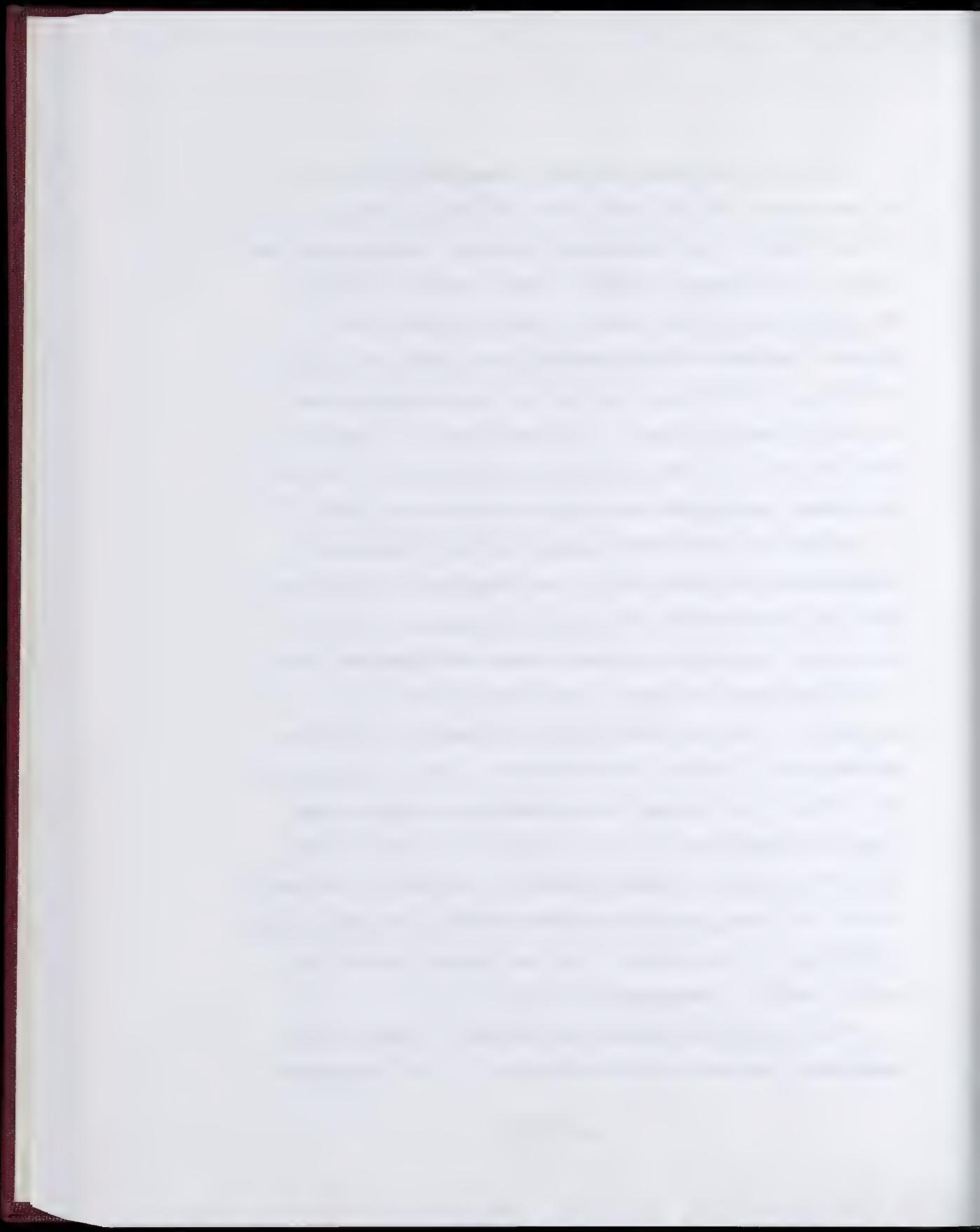


The Stoclets owned the most famous modern house in all of Europe. It had been built for them by Josef Hoffmann and it had decorations inside by Gustav Klimt and others of the Vienna Secession group. Fabulous house.

When Adolf Stoclet was dying, he had the Cambodian Krishna-- He had a little theater where they put on plays and things in his house. He had it [the statue] moved, and that's where he kept it, on that stage. He had his couch rolled in to the Krishna when he was dying, to see that piece, one of the last things that he ever did.

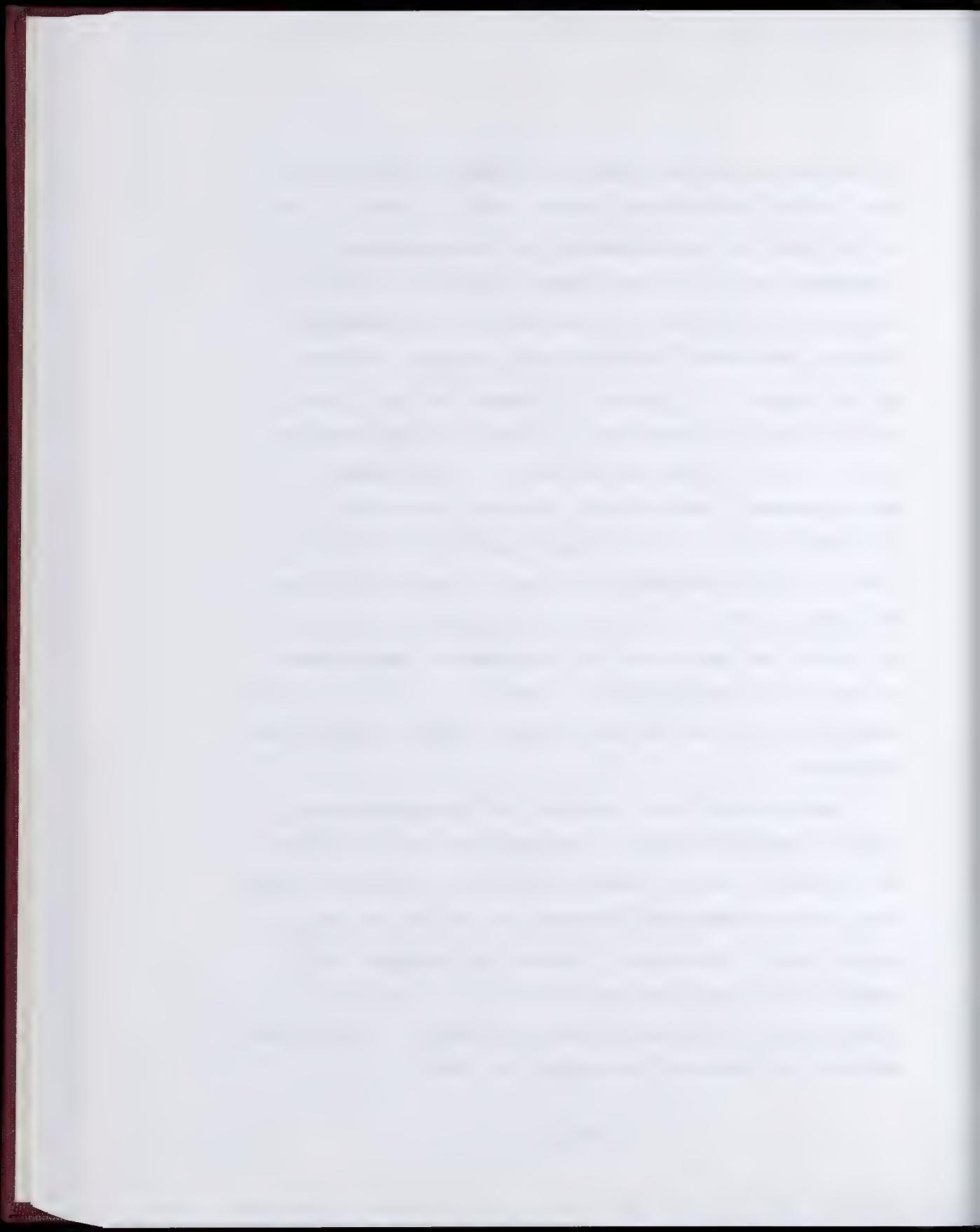
Before he died, these pieces arrived. They were photographed, and Paul Mallon, who knew the Stoclets very well, was permitted to take these photographs. They showed all the pieces and they showed that they had tried to fit them onto the piece. And indeed, some of the pieces fit. Some of them didn't, but some did. But Mrs. Stoclet didn't like it with additions. This is typical of the-- This is an extreme of the aesthetic point of view. I don't subscribe to it. But there it was. And so they said, "Now we're not going to use it. We like it the way it is." So they, according to Paul Mallon, had thrown the pieces away in the garden. They had buried them in the garden. Well, I remembered all this.

Then the Stoclet estate was divided. Then it was subdivided, because there was a niece. I was introduced



by the Mallons to the Brussels main branch of the family, and I saw the house and so forth. Phillippe Stoclet lived in New York, and we had bought from his collection a Romanesque crucifix. Then another Stoclet, a niece, was in Barcelona, and she's the one that got the Cambodian Krishna. Ruth and I went on a trip to Spain. We knew another dealer, Nat [Nathan V.] Hammer, who was a very amusing, terribly funny man, who knew the niece, because he was a guitar player and he knew all of the Spanish guitar masters. She evidently had this house where I guess everything went on: drugs, music, and everything under the sun in Barcelona. So when I knew that she had the piece, we went to Barcelona. We tried to get to see her and it was impossible. We got special interpreters, but one said, "This place is a madhouse. I can't make any sense of it." So we failed. We had to leave without ever seeing her.

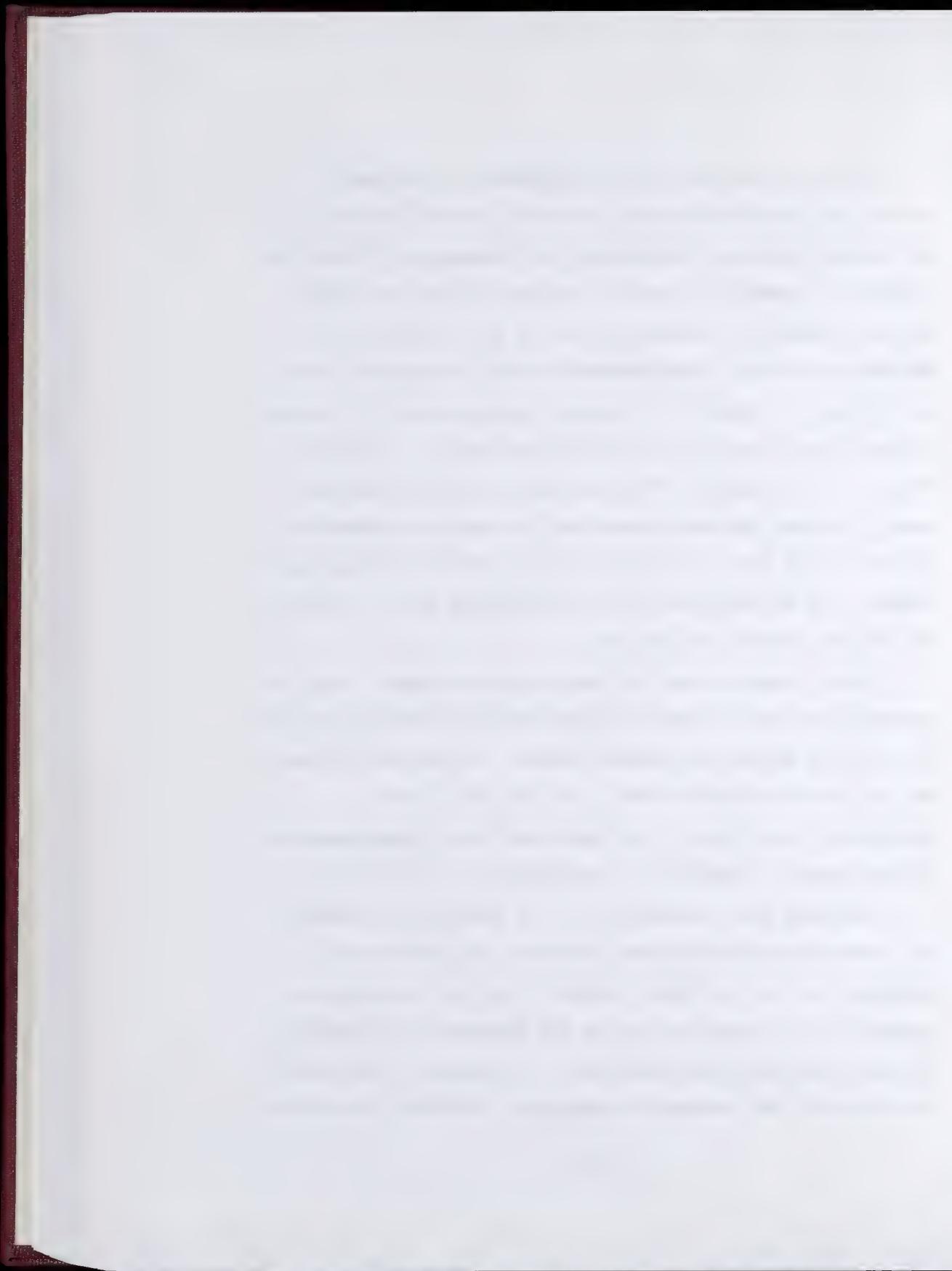
Then we heard that the piece had been given to be sold. I called the Mallons and they knew the lawyer for the Stoclets. Well, I tried through him. I was told the piece was in a free-zone warehouse in Zurich, but this lawyer couldn't get to it. Then all of a sudden, Nat Hammer said he could get the piece. And it was very complicated, but he did. He got the Krishna. But then he died and the piece was once again in limbo.



To cut a long story short, finally, a few years later, one of Nat's friends, who was a famous dealer in old master paintings and modern art, Eugene [V.] Thaw--he works with Artemis in London--was able to get the piece, and he offered it, unknown to me, to Mr. [John D.] Rockefeller [III]. John showed me the photographs, and I said, "Well, I think it's a great, great piece. I've been trying to get that piece for over ten years." He said, "Well, I'm not keen." This was just the torso and the head. He said he wasn't keen and it was too fragmentary, and so, as he said, "I'm not going to take it." Boy, we bought that so fast, at a very substantial price. We got it in a big hurry, but we got it.

Then I made a date, my next trip to Europe, to go to Brussels and see old Mme. Stoclet, who was still alive, to try to find about the missing pieces. So we went to see her at this marvelous house. She was very, very hospitable, very nice. She said they'd put them someplace in the garden. That's all I could get out of her.

And then more serendipity. Our curator of Indian art, Stan [Stanislaw] Czuma, ran into the curator of oriental art at the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels, who turned out to be the daughter of an artist who had made sculpture bases for the Stoclets. She said to Stan that she remembered something that her father had



said about this. Well, then we went tearing to try to get this thing straightened out. We found from her that her father no longer lived in the place next door to the Stoclet house. It had been rented to another artist. The pieces had been buried in the rose garden of that house.

So we went to see the artist who now had the house, and he didn't want to disturb the rose garden. We finally made a deal. We said, "We'll pay for the laborers. We'll pay for the whole thing to put it back just the way it looks. You have to be satisfied." He finally said okay. So then Stan went over. We hired a couple of day laborers and started digging. The first thing they found, the first piece, was on the ground being used as part of a stone border for the rose garden. It was part of a thigh. They dug and they found, well, I think about a dozen different pieces. It was an excavation being conducted in Brussels for the remains of one of the great pieces of early Cambodian sculpture. So we had it all shipped over. We fixed the garden up so he was happy, and all of the stones wound up in Cleveland. We started to work to put it together. I can show you what it looks like before and after. You'll be interested to see. But now it's monumental. It's as high as that beam there. It's a great, great sculpture, and it's just such an unbelievable story. It also shows how you have to be lucky and you



also have to know-- I mean, none of the scholars know anything about this. This is a kind of thing that dealers know about or guitar players or-- It's unbelievable.

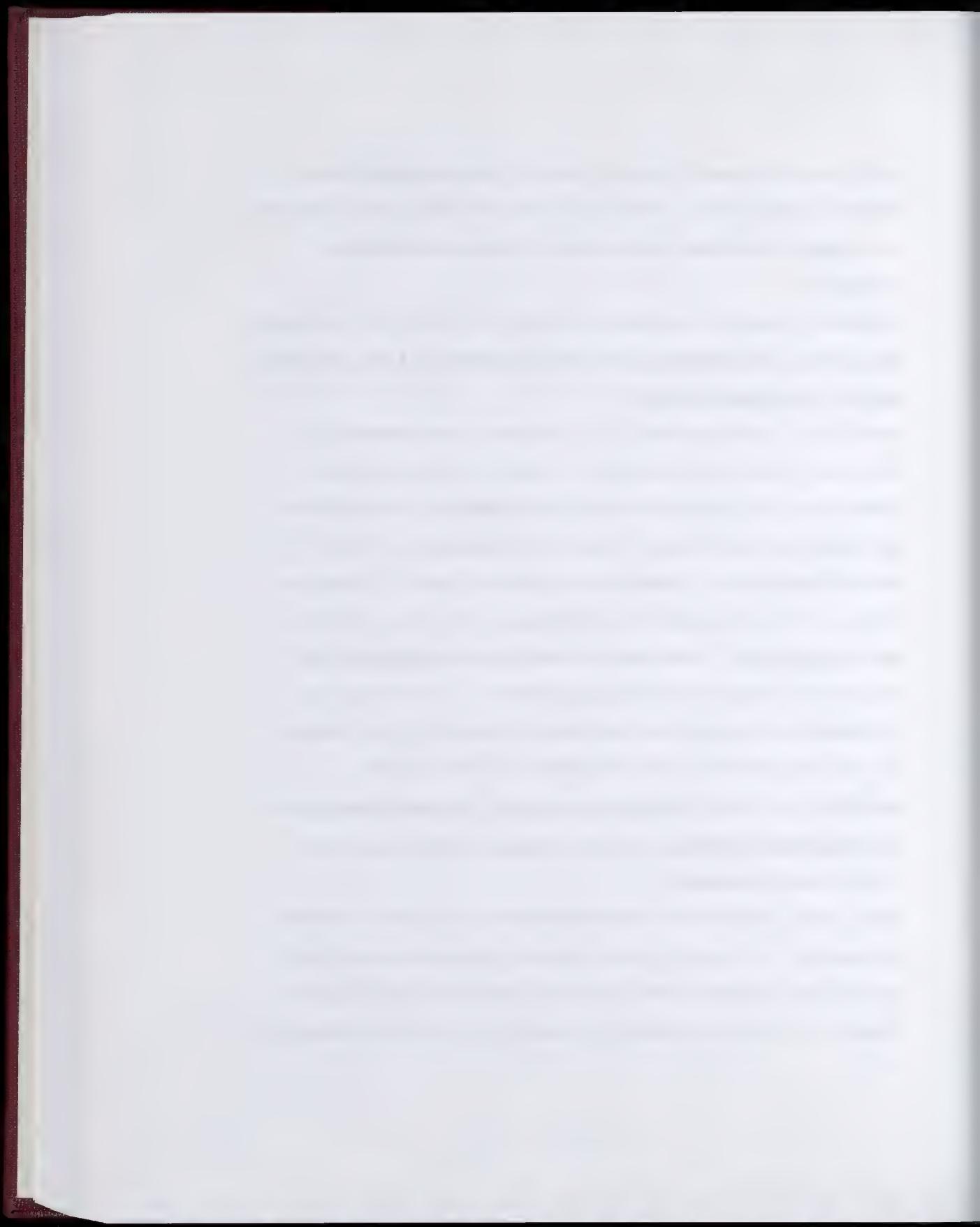
[laughter]

GARDNER: That's a wonderful story. In 1970 you published Asian Art: [Selections from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd]?

LEE: Yes, that was the first volume of the Rockefeller catalog. The collection was of course known and much admired by all the people who knew about it, but it had not been publicly shown. John and Blanchette [Ferry Hooker Rockefeller] wanted very much to have it used and known, and so they had two showings. The first showing was Asian Art I. The second showing was Asian Art II. There were selections displayed from all countries and a different selection for the second showing. And, again, it was to introduce the collection to the public.

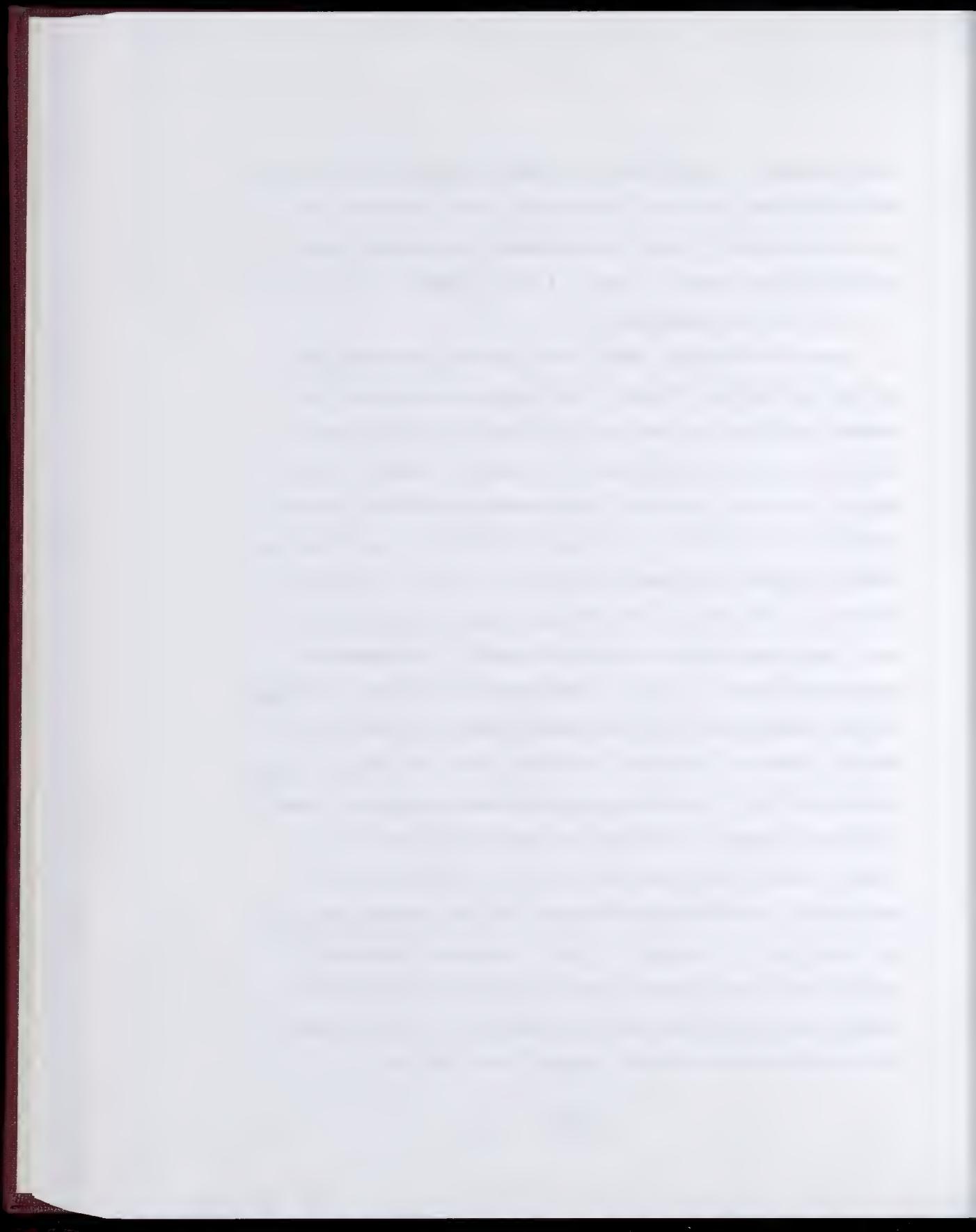
GARDNER: In 1974, The Colors of Ink: [Chinese Paintings and Related Ceramics from the Cleveland Museum of Art (with James Robinson)].

LEE: Yes. That's an exhibition which I think is quite wonderful. I think it had a degree of originality to it. But it was called forth simply by the fact that I got a phone call from the gallery director at the Asia Society,



Allen Wardwell, saying that they had a cancellation of an exhibition and they were desperate. They needed to have an exhibition in I think it was about six months. Six months or eight months. Well, I said, "Okay. Let me see if I can cook up something."

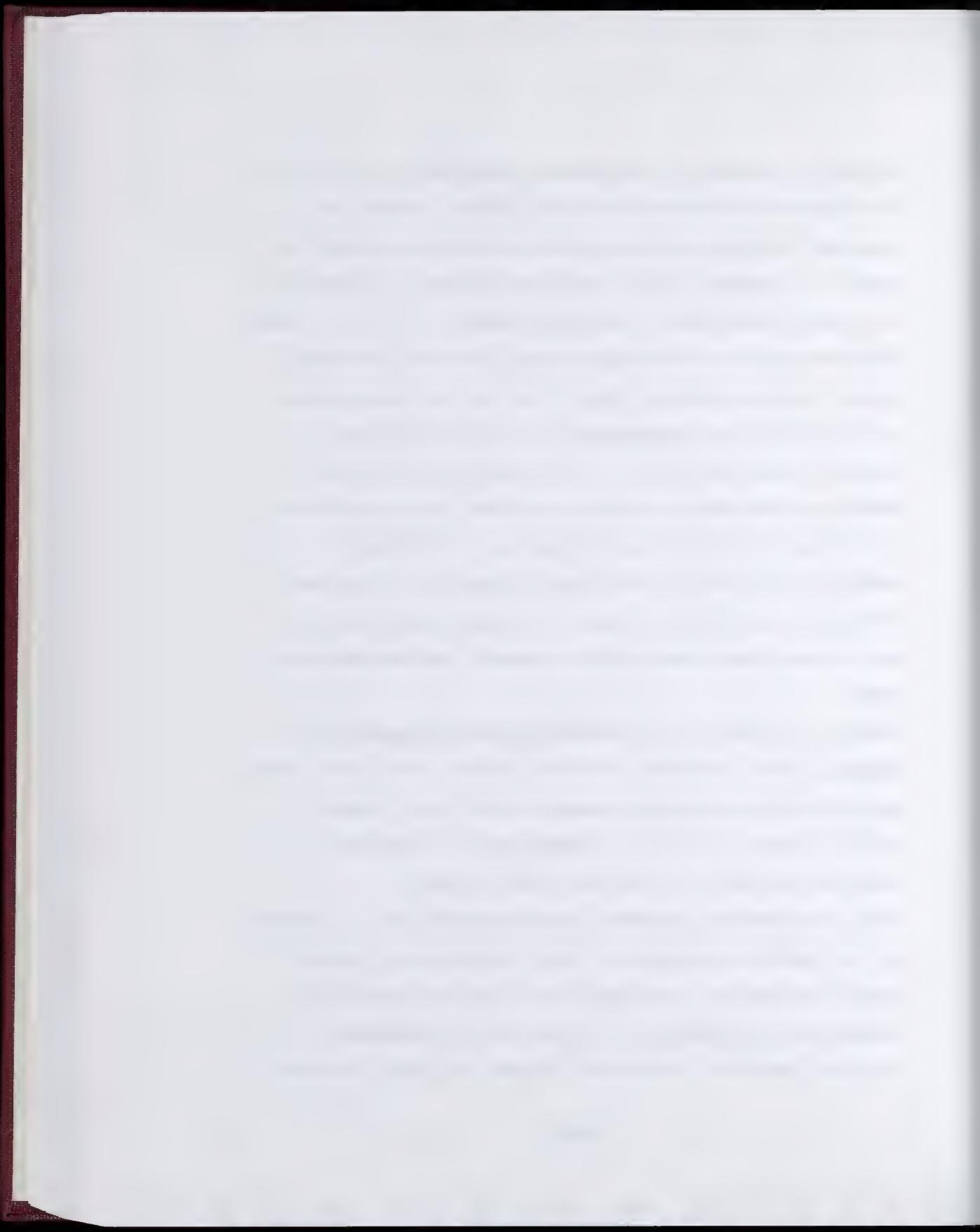
One of the things that I was always interested in, and one of the key things-- The difference between Far Eastern painting and Western painting is that in Western painting you think in terms of oil paint, fresco, lots of colors, solidity, and etc. Far Eastern painting, though there is very colorful painting--there's wall painting and there's tempera painting--one thing's first: characteristically, the majority of the paintings are executed in ink. And that's quite, quite different. Europeans or Westerners find it hard to understand how Chinese painting can be looked upon as so important when it's really just a form of drawing, according to their mind-set. Whereas the Easterners don't understand why the Westerners can't see that ink is such a flexible, varied medium that it is unbelievable. And there are texts-- The title of the exhibition is a quotation from one of the Chinese writers who spoke of "the colors of ink." There is warm ink, there's cool ink, there's pale ink, there's silvery ink, there's brown ink, and so forth and so on. So I thought we could put together very quickly from our own



collection, basically, monochrome paintings to illustrate and explain the concept of colors of ink. And to add interest to the show, we could use ceramics of black and white in character, which would include the, not peasant, but lower-class wares of the Sung dynasty, Tz'u-chou ware, which has black and white painting, but also including some of the porcelains. Their Ting-yao is a warm white, and the early Ming monochrome white porcelains are a greenish blue, cold white. So we made an exhibition. James Robinson and I wrote an essay and catalog entries, and we got the show done, the catalog printed and everything in time for the show to happen. It was very successful, and I think, again, it made people stop and think about the differences in concepts between East and West.

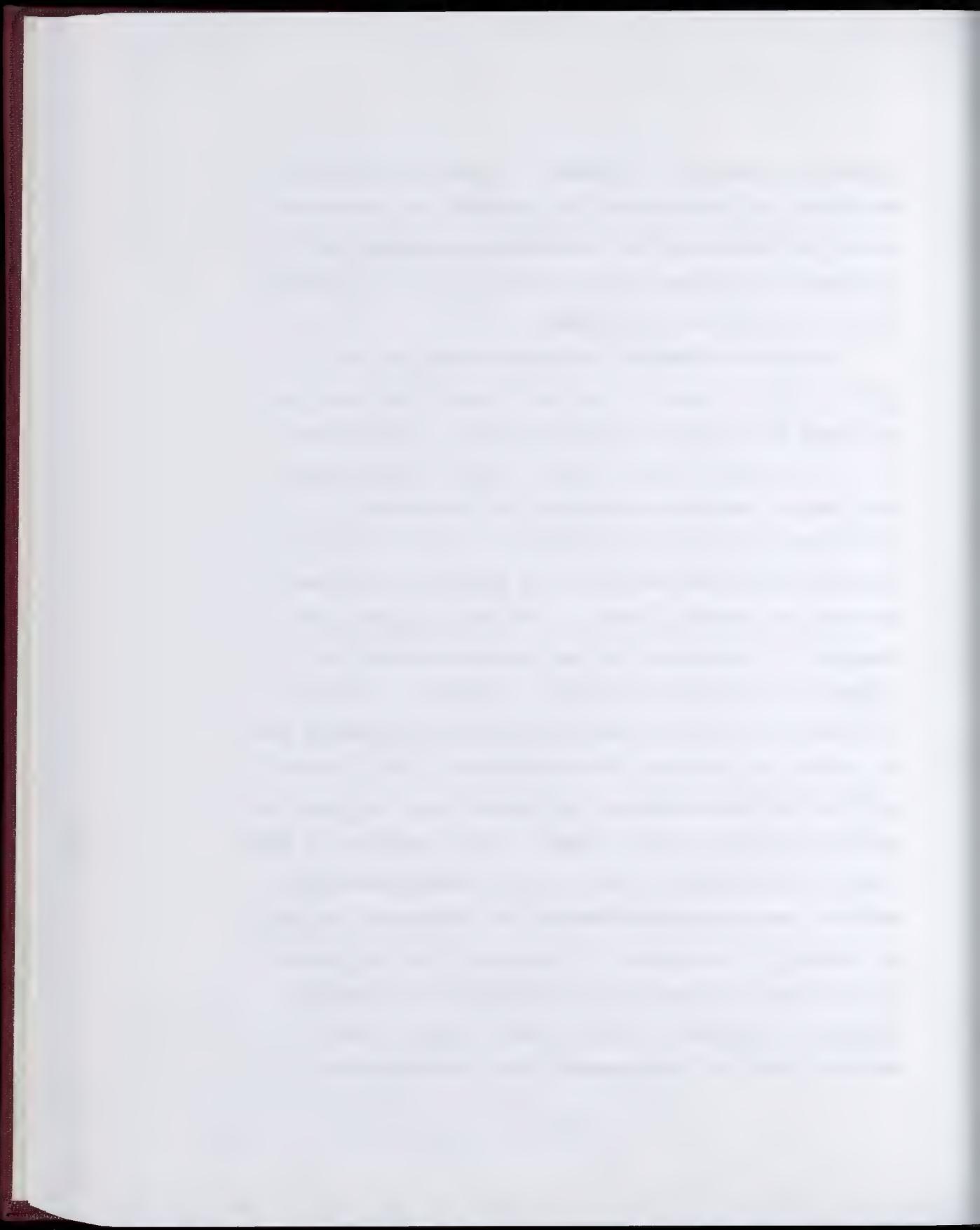
GARDNER: In 1975, you published On Understanding Art Museums, which we happen to have sitting right here. And you wrote an introductory essay as well, as I recall. Could you talk a little bit about how this came about and what the purpose of it was and what it said?

LEE: The American Assembly, which operates still I think out of Columbia University, is an organization, a non-profit foundation, that each year holds an assembly, a conference, on a subject. It can be on disarmament, on the law, abortion. It can be on what you want, and they



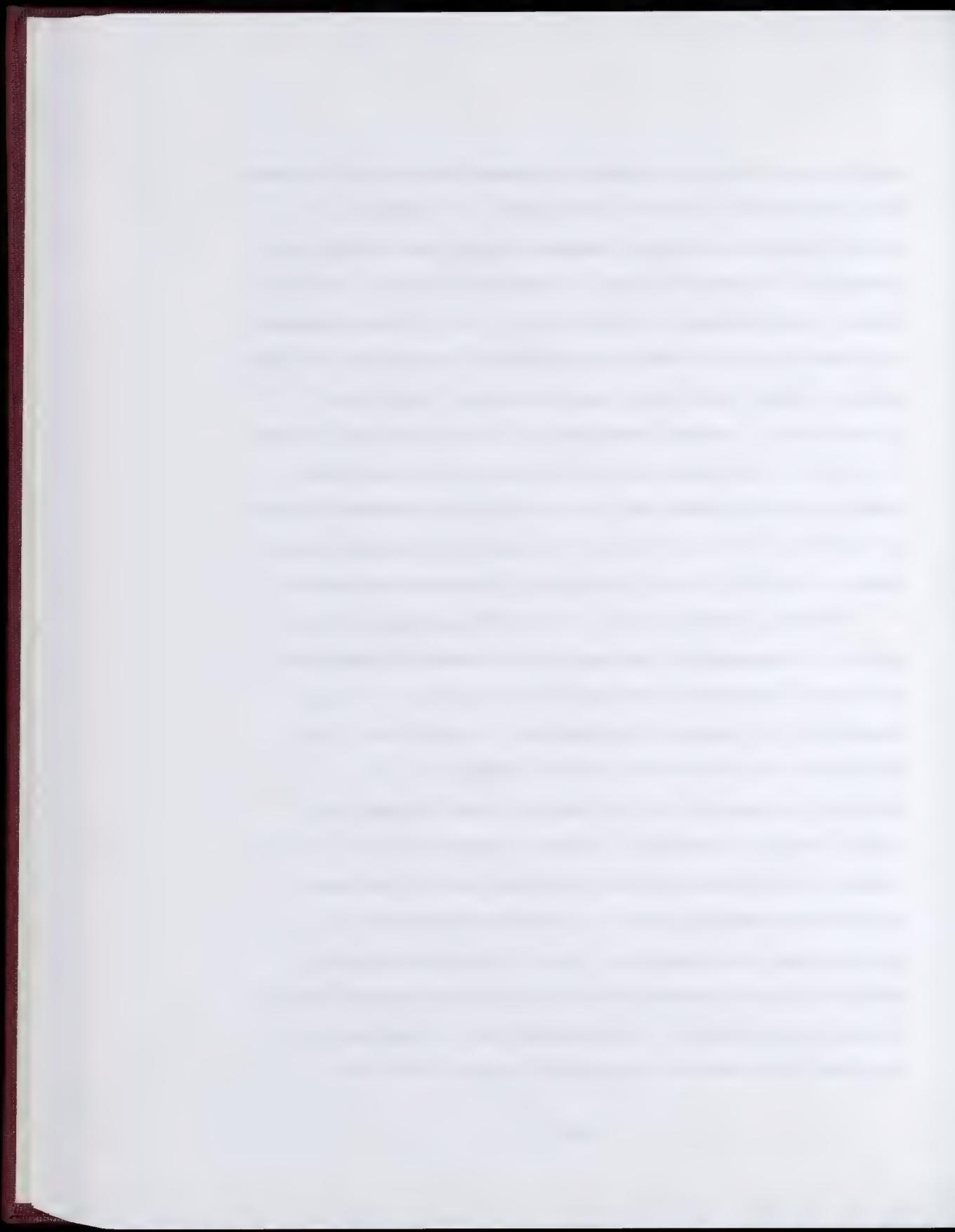
wanted to do one on art museums. It was '74, and they approached me and asked me if I would be the responsible person for organizing the conference and editing the publication which they usually issue after the conference is over. Not a bad idea at all.

So one had to select the participants who were to write. I said I would write the introduction, along with my friend Ed [Edward B.] Henning, curator of modern art [at the Cleveland Museum of Art]. Then we asked Joshua [C.] Taylor, who was the director of the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington [D.C.] and who had written articles on the history of art museums, to write the essay on the art museum in the United States. Then Charles [P.] Parkhurst, who had been director of the [Allen Memorial Art] Museum and a professor at Oberlin [College] and who was a very logical and very factual type of person, to tackle the different kinds of art museums, such as the organization and so forth. Then, in terms of education and scholarship, George [Heard] Hamilton at Yale [University], who was an authority on postimpressionism and also was very much interested in the history and the development of scholarship in America. Then Dan [Daniel C.] Rich, who had been a very good director of the Art Institute of Chicago and who is well versed in his subject, which was "management, power, and integrity,"



particularly the relationships between boards and trustees and patrons and so forth and museums. In addition, I wanted to have an artist, because one of the things that I always try to remind people is that art museums, at first anyway, were primarily for artists. That's where Cézanne and Degas and all those boys found the inspiration and the means to make their great contributions. But I'm a conservative. Walter Darby Bannard is an abstract painter and a very, very good one, but he had always been more intellectually interested in relationships between museums and artists. He's not one of the sort of flaming radical types of artist. He's a thoughtful conservative artist.

Finally, I have always admired the essays of Robert Coles. I happened to run across him because I had gone out with a professor from Boston University who was a teacher of my youngest daughter for a brief time. He invited me to go out with him to dinner at E. H. Erickson's place out in the country, and I dined out there. He was wonderful. He was a marvelous man. But he talked so much about Robert Coles and how he had been doing such wonderful work. I read his essays and I thought they were terrific. And I thought we should definitely have somebody who was not an art museum person, who was not an artist, but somebody who is dealing with everyday life and our society and dealing with it in a



sensitive and effective way. I asked Coles if he would do it, and he did. And that's how we got the lineup.

The conference was, like most conferences, a big hurly-burly of discussion and argument. Most of the artists wanted to burn down the museums. There were some business types there who wanted to make them efficient. Everybody had their own ax to grind. But it seemed to have been successful.

Then it was carried on. It was developed further by the American Assembly in cooperation with the Ditchley group, where they hold annual conferences at the [Ditchley] estate, out near Oxford [England], where the secret code and coding research had been done during World War II. It was an estate owned by [Sir Herbert] Beerbohm Tree and Marietta Tree and that acting family. It was a very nice eighteenth-century estate. The interior was fine, but the furnishings had fallen on sad times. It was a different kind of conference. It was specifically oriented to museums. We had all the museum directors of Europe. I mean, John [W.] Pope-Hennessy and Carl [A.] Nordenfalk from Stockholm, and from Berlin [Stephan] Waetzoldt. Everybody was there. Germain Bazin from the Louvre was there. He was then still curator at the Louvre.



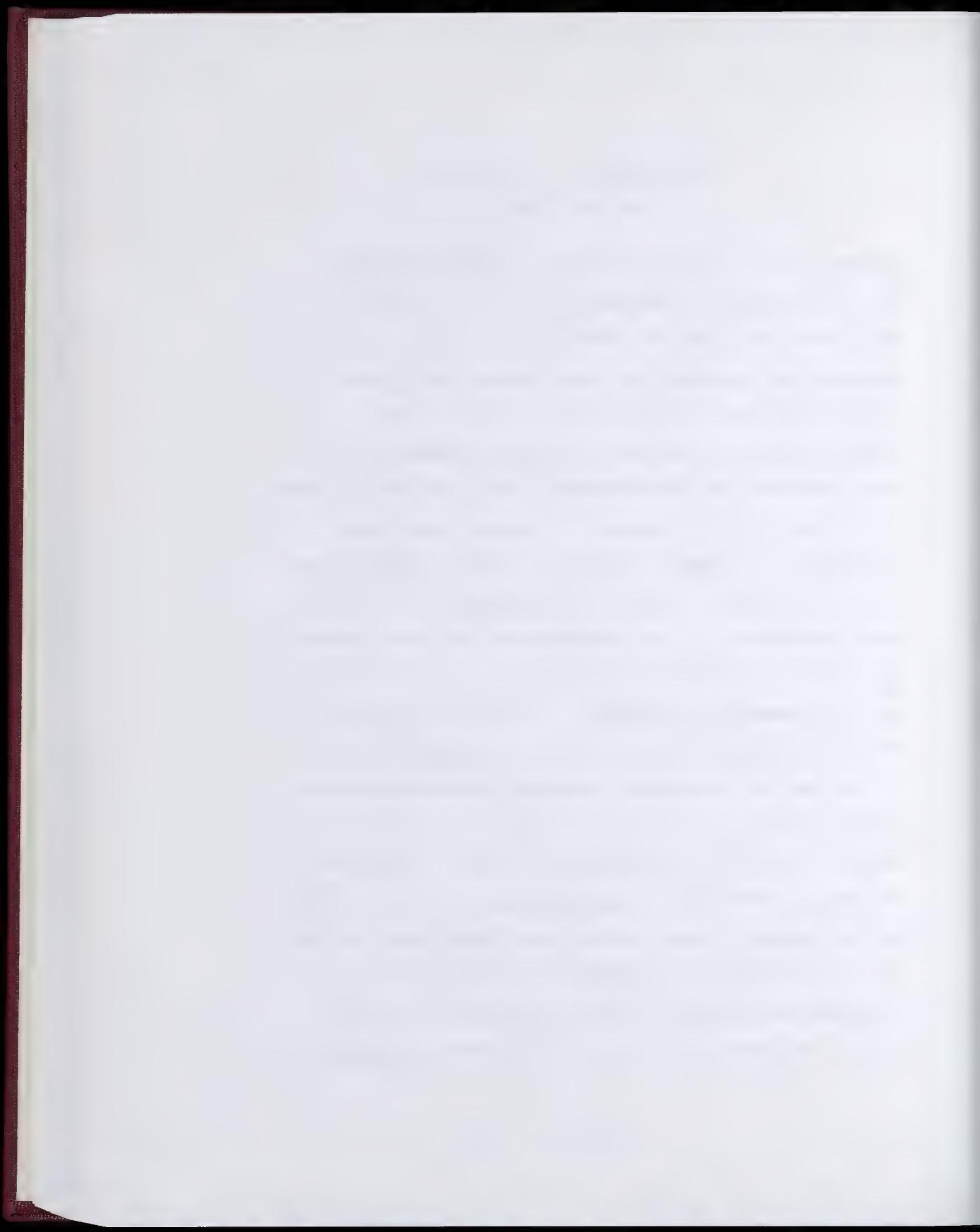
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GARDNER: We'll continue the story of the gathering.

LEE: There was the conference. We had a couple of representatives from East Germany. I think the one thing that was very constructive that came out of it was everyone one was trying to pave the way and get conversation going and get agreements underway so that there would be more cooperation in East and West in terms of the needs of art museums. I remember the former director of the museum in Naples [Raffaello Causa], who was a fine scholar, a very interesting man, but he was quite pessimistic. John Pope-Hennessy was the chairman of the Ditchley conference, and he was a very intelligent man--kept everything straight. One of the highlights was that it was wonderful to get all these people together.

We met for three days, and each evening there was a lecture after dinner. The last lecture was to be given by Germain Bazin, and it was based-- I think he was then writing his book called The Museum Age. He spoke partly English, partly French, and he kept going on and on and on. Pope-Hennessy was asleep and Nordenfalk from Stockholm was lying full-length on chairs and he was asleep, and Bazin kept saying, "I'm almost finished." And



everybody was just going crazy. It must have lasted almost two hours, and this is after dinner and drinks and so forth and so on. And that finally was over with.

There was a lot of good fellowship, and for me it was fascinating. It's one of the last occasions I can remember in the form of a conference or an official gathering of people-- And, I mean, I count that as involving all the different professional organizations I've been in and so on. But it was one of the last occasions in which you had a lot of basically like-minded people, of varying temperaments and minds, but all dedicated to art museums and their purposes and all very civilized. The European museum directors are remarkable people. It just had a wonderful resonance to the thing. It was very civilized. And when I think back, things really began to change much more after that. You began to get these more prosaic or institutionalized, business-oriented, finance-worried kinds of gatherings, where things are really-- Well, they don't leave you with a good taste in the mouth after it.

But it was an interesting thing to do, and I think this book On Understanding Art Museums is still used in some circles, perhaps more conservative ones. I think it's a good summary of the traditional, mid-century concept of the art museum, and if you want to understand



that concept, I think this is a useful, useful publication.

GARDNER: What kind of reaction did you get to it? Aside from the general celebratory one that you described. From those who were not--

LEE: You mean after the publication and so forth?

GARDNER: Yes. Right.

LEE: My recollection would be that it did not have much impact. I think it was held at a turning point and the new generation was not interested in this kind of thing. There were a few reviews of it. And Coles's essay attracted considerable attention, which I think it should have. It's very good and very moving. George Hamilton's I cut in half. You can imagine-- I would have had to have given half of the space of the book for his first essay. That made him very angry. But I would say that it came at a turning point. This is '74 we said.

GARDNER: Right, '74 to '75.

LEE: Yes. The late sixties had happened. And the financial crunch was beginning. The inevitable contraction of the art market in terms of quantity and quality of works available was happening. And perhaps the conference and the publication are more important as a memorial, as it were, to mid-century thinking on museums. The new wave was just beginning to take full hold, and

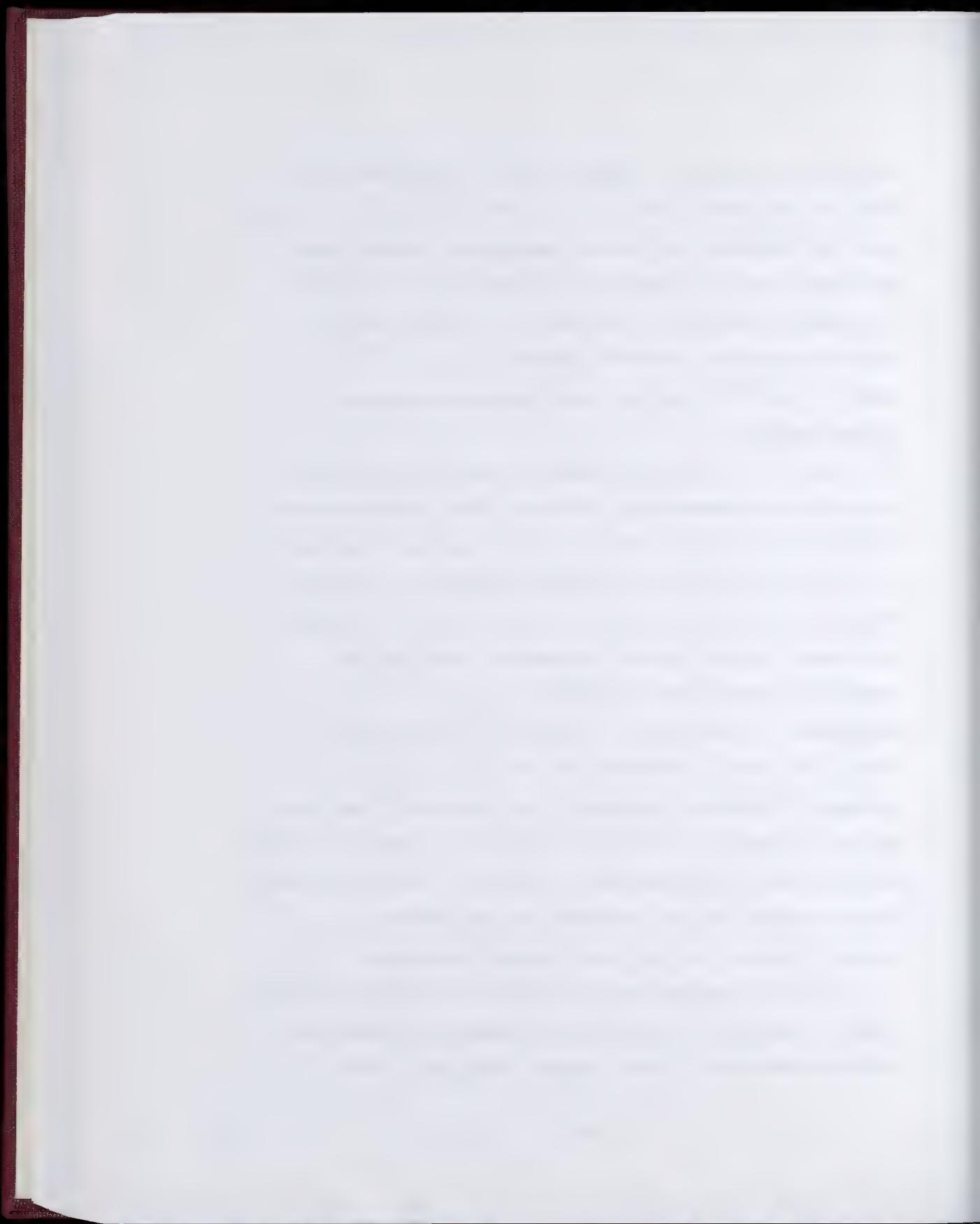


naturally they weren't looking back. I would say that we've now had over twenty years of the new wave. It seems to me that it might be time to reread and restudy what some other people in the past who have had a lot to do with museums thought and did about it. There might be some surprises that might be useful.

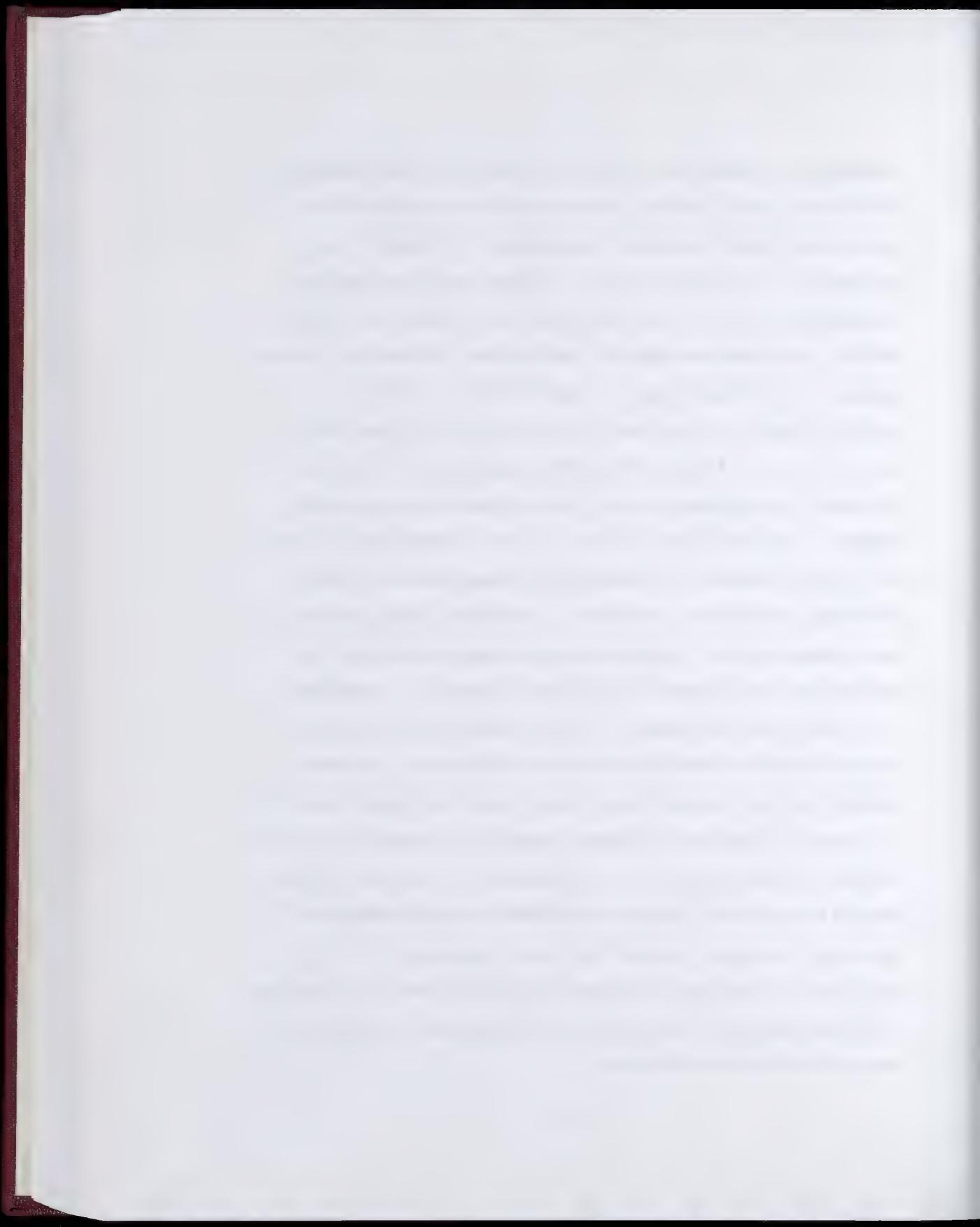
GARDNER: In 1980, you published Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting.

LEE: Well, we've already discussed that in terms of the exhibition and serendipity of Kansas City [Art Institute Gallery] and Cleveland [Museum of Art] working together to mold the two collections together as the most important holding of Chinese paintings in this country. Even more than Freer [Gallery of Art] or Boston. And the two collections complement each other very well. The publication I think is out of print. It's been very useful. It occurs constantly in the literature, the scholarly literature, because it was the first time that the two collections had been, in a sense, presented to the scholarly world with scholarly apparatus. And that's one of the reasons that we wanted to do the exhibition, because it meant that we had a catalog available.

One of the things that I always felt at Cleveland was terribly important, something that American museums are guilty of not doing, is to publish catalogs of their



collections. They don't do the things that the Europeans used to do. Now, I'm not talking about popularization; I'm talking about scholarly research. If there's no catalog of a collection--not a picture book and not an introduction and not masterpieces, but a catalog, a real catalog like the catalogs of the Wallace Collection or the catalogs of the paintings in the National Gallery of London--there's no way that the scholars can know about what is there and know what other people know about what is there, unless they happen to go there and the stuff happens to be available to them. Many museums don't have--can't have because of conservation requirements--their paintings on view all the time. Sometimes there simply isn't enough staff to provide for adequate changing of collections, so there's a constant turnover. Sometimes it's just sheer laziness. It is a chore to do this, but unless there's a catalog of the collection so you know what is not on view and what there is to be known about it in terms of state of knowledge about that thing, you're in the dark. The museum and the scholars in the museum have not fulfilled their responsibilities to other scholars. That was the major reason that Larry [Laurence Sickman] and I said we had to go through with this and do it, aside from the fact that Larry also was delighted to tweak Wen Fong a bit on his exhibition.



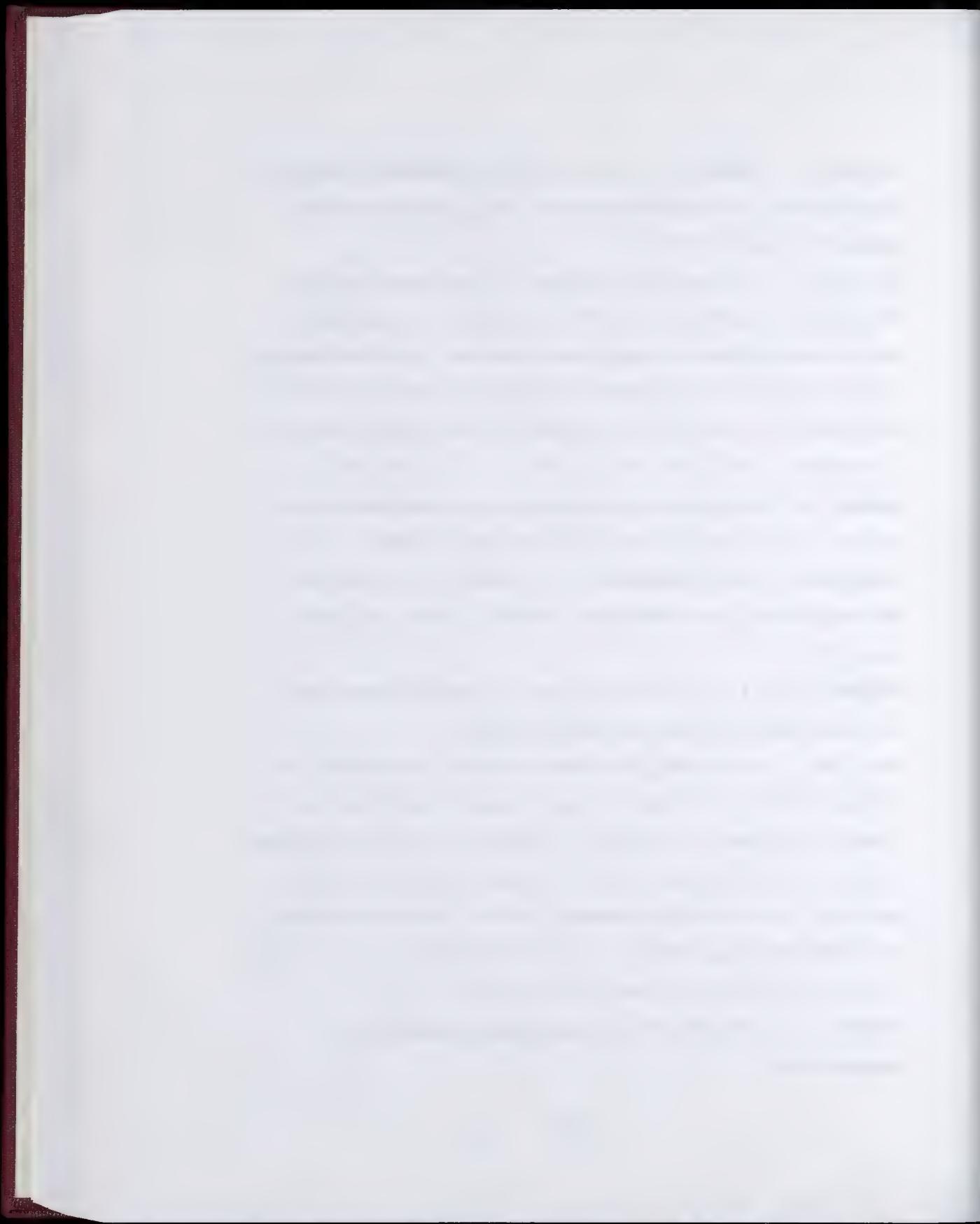
GARDNER: [laughter] In 1981 you did A Thousand Years of Japanese Art. So Eight Dynasties and A Thousand Years in successive years, that--

LEE: Well, that was an exhibition at the Japan Society. Rand Castile asked to have the exhibition. He wanted to have an exhibition of selections from the Cleveland Museum of Art collection of Japanese art for the Japan Society so that people in New York could see it. We thought that was a reasonably good idea, so we worked on it. We had several of the curators and assistants who helped on the catalog, and we got it out in rather short order. The Japan Society was responsible for design and production, and they made a very beautiful catalog. Have you ever seen it?

GARDNER: No, I don't think I have. [tape recorder off]
Is there anything else you want to say?

LEE: No. I think the Japan Society did a marvelous job on that catalog. We had a tough time getting it out on schedule because it was, again, something that was planned not all that far ahead. But it looked very well. And I must say I think a lot of people in New York were sort of "bouleversed" when they saw all this stuff that had piled up in that provincial town of Cleveland.

GARDNER: In 1983 you did Reflections of Reality in Japanese Art.



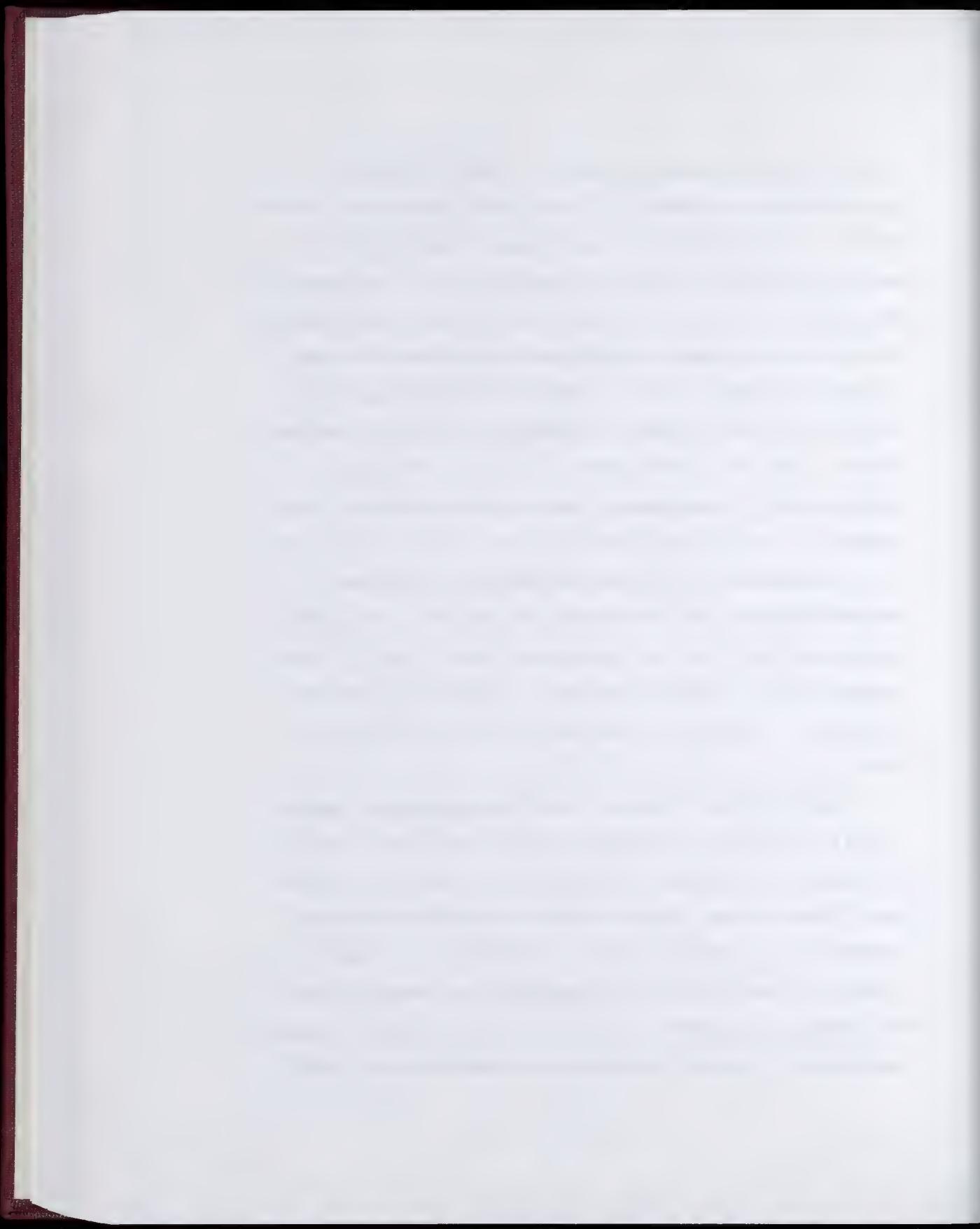
LEE: Well, we've discussed that rather briefly. It has been a follow-up on the other side of the medal of Japanese creativity, from Japanese Decorative Style in '63 to Reflections of Reality. It really was a stunning exhibition. I think it made a real contribution.

I'm interested in connoisseurship. I'm interested in scholarship, as far as I'm capable of doing it. I'm interested also in ideas. I find I have very little patience and a very short fuse with pedantry. And I think an awful lot of scholarship has become more and more pedantic. One of Marion [J.] Levy's eleven laws--he's professor of Far Eastern political science at Princeton [University]--is that "No amount of genius can overcome a preoccupation with detail." I think that's true. Especially in a field as difficult because of language problems and so forth as Chinese art and archaeology, Chinese painting, Japanese art, scholars I think are absolutely obsessed with a fear of being caught in error. There was a symposium held in Cleveland in connection with Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting. The editor, who had moved from Cleveland as a curator to Kansas City, has had the manuscripts from the various people in the symposium since that symposium in 1980, and the record--that is, the proceedings of the symposium--has still not appeared in print. I think it's a responsibility to get things out.



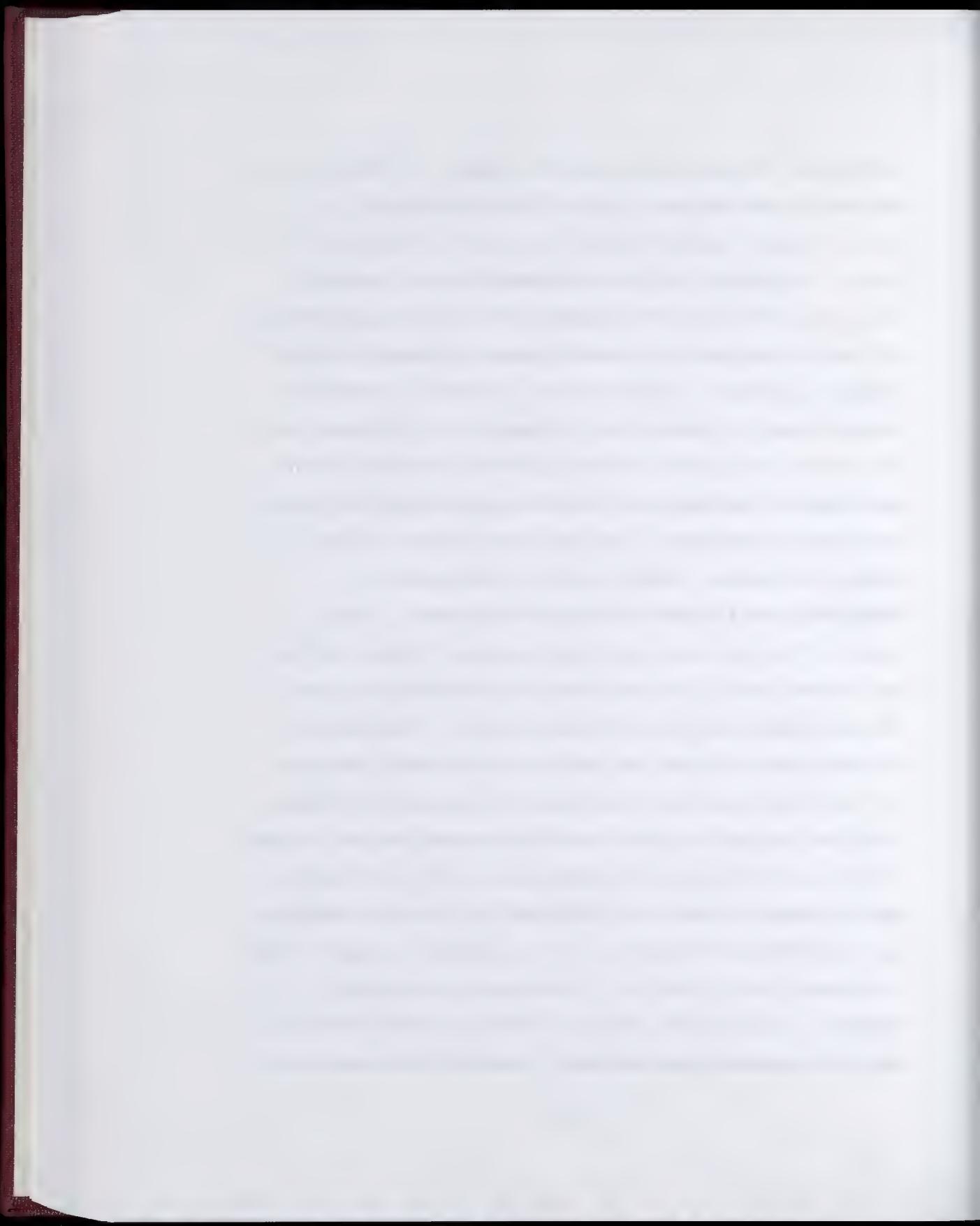
I think everybody makes mistakes. I don't think one should downplay mistakes. I don't think one should ignore them. I think one should try to avoid them, if it's possible. But you're going to make mistakes. My favorite aphorism--I've said it over and over so many times that my children and my grandchildren just cringe when they see I'm going to say it again--is one written by Guglielmo Ferrero, who was an Italian psychologist of the nineteenth century. And it is very simple. It says, "What makes good judgment? Experience. What makes experience? Bad judgment." Well, that's how you learn. And I think that it's a responsibility to educate people. It's your responsibility to be as accurate as you can. It's your responsibility to do what you can do best. And it's your responsibility to expose yourself to error in order to move ahead. That's just the way I'm built and the way I do it.

Anyhow, we were talking about Reflections of Reality. I still think that exhibition and its texts were useful. The essay is my doing. The catalog entries were divided among three or four different curators working for the exhibition. I think it made a contribution. I know visually it was a smash and everybody was amazed at that. The Japanese cooperated fully and in a way I never thought they would. I think the exhibition made a point, and I



don't think the exhibition had the impact, in terms of the catalog and its concept, that it should have had. I think, in part, again, because it is sort of against the grain. The things that are published now are basically very, very detailed and circumscribed in their perimeters. The idea of saying things about general movements, about things in general, is not too much in favor. Historians like William [H.] McNeill at [University of] Chicago, who has written the quite wonderful general histories of the world and of the impact of the East on the West and so on, he's against the grain. You get these reviews of his books, for example, where they're looked upon as anomalies, not focused enough and too general. And there's "This is wrong and this is wrong." Well, you've got to have both. You must have the scholarly article, the monograph, the detailed consideration of esoterica. You must have that and you must also have works that try to tie things together or propose new concepts and ideas. It's just as you've got to have businessmen and you've got to have aestheticians and museum people and you've got to have orchestra directors. Live and let live and everyone try to do the best they can. It's a simple, pragmatic way of thinking and I like it. I wish more people did.

GARDNER: Also in 1983, the [G.] Braziller book came out, Past and Present: East and West. How did that come about?



LEE: Well, this was done by the museum. They asked Remy Saisselin, who had been at the museum and had done the Style, Truth, and the Portrait exhibition-- He's now professor at the University of Rochester. That's where he's been. He's written some very interesting books on French taste in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century and so on. We like and admire each other. He was a great friend of Ed Henning's too. But they decided that they would do a book which would pull together some of my articles that might not otherwise have been called to people's attention. Yes, it's a kind of a collected essays sort of thing. I heard little about it because they didn't want me to know too much about it.

GARDNER: Really?

LEE: Well, they wanted a surprise. That's how it came about, and then, you see, Ed Henning wrote an introductory note and the preface was written by Saisselin.

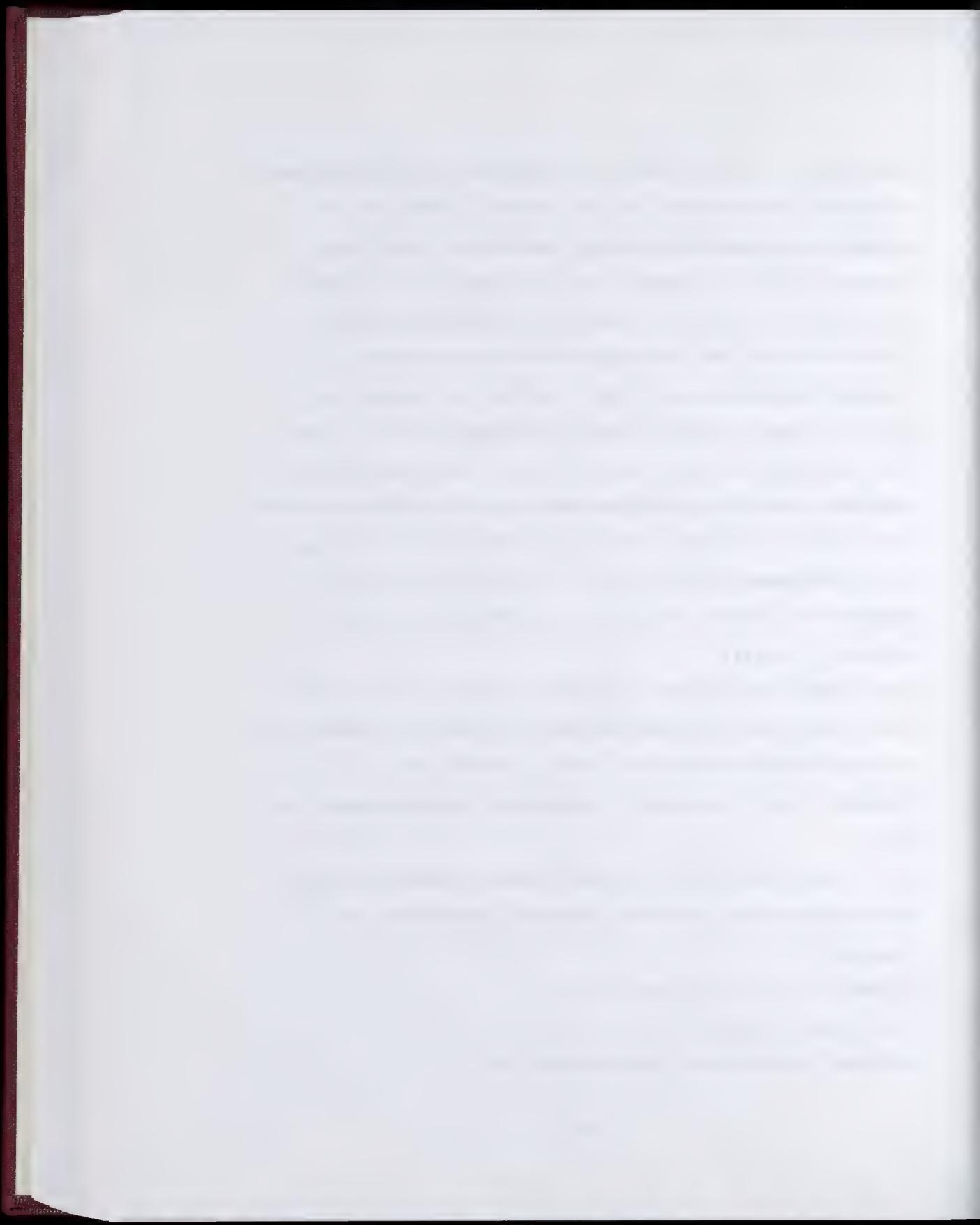
GARDNER: Then there was a foreword by Nelson Goodman as well.

LEE: Yes. Did I tell you about Nelson Goodman and the association of art museums [American Association of Museums]?

GARDNER: No, because we're still--

LEE: We're coming to it.

GARDNER: We're still putting that off.



LEE: Okay. Right. It won't hurt. Anyhow, I admired Nelson and he liked me. We saw each other whenever I went to Cambridge. He gave the museum a very beautiful early Marsden Hartley painting. We had connections. Remy thought it would be kind of nice to have him write an introduction because, I think, he's a distinguished philosopher, especially for aesthetics in art, and people might pay attention if he did something. So that's how that came about.

GARDNER: So it was originally published internally, or was it that the--?

LEE: No. Braziller.

GARDNER: So the museum arranged for Braziller to be the publisher of it.

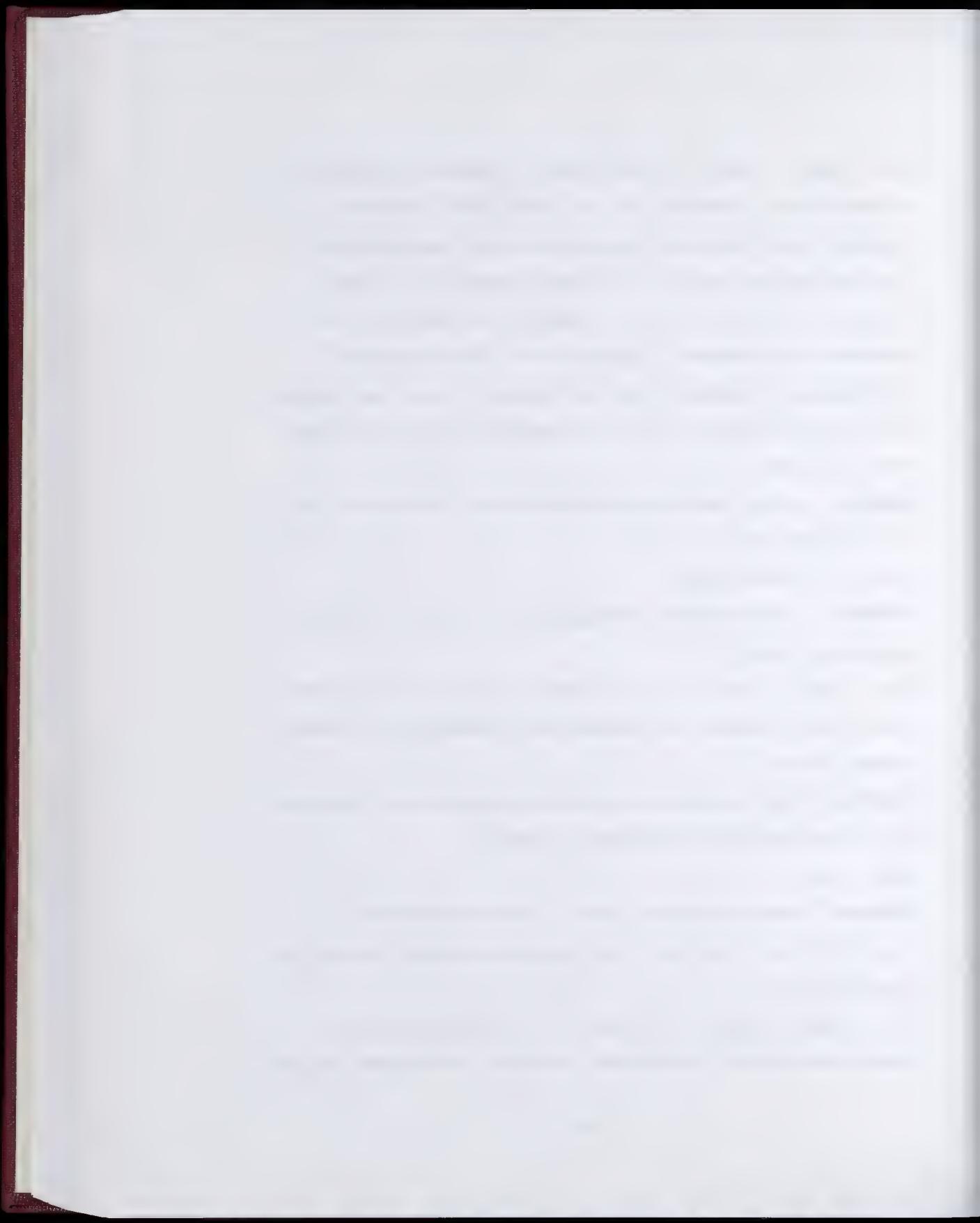
LEE: Yes. Right. Braziller wanted to do it, and I don't know, but I suspect the museum put in something to make it easier to do.

GARDNER: What did you think of the selection of articles? The first half are philosophical really.

LEE: Yes.

GARDNER: The second half are-- I guess one would call them "critical" perhaps, dealing with works or periods or types of art.

LEE: Right. Right. I think it's a good selection. There are various things that I'm still interested in and



I think they're useful articles and a variety of subjects. I think they also reveal interests and my own development, beginning with "American Watercolor Painting," "The Illustrative Watercolors of Charles Demuth," and my interest in Western art and my primary interest in oriental art. So I thought it was a very wonderful gesture and I much appreciated it. There were other articles that I think are interesting too. I think it's a sound selection, and I respect Remy Saisselin's judgment a great deal. He knows what's what.

GARDNER: I was interested in some of your philosophical essays, because they elucidate a lot of the things you've talked about the last couple of days. I don't know whether to ask you about all of them because I don't know how long it's been. Do you recall them all well? Or shall I--?

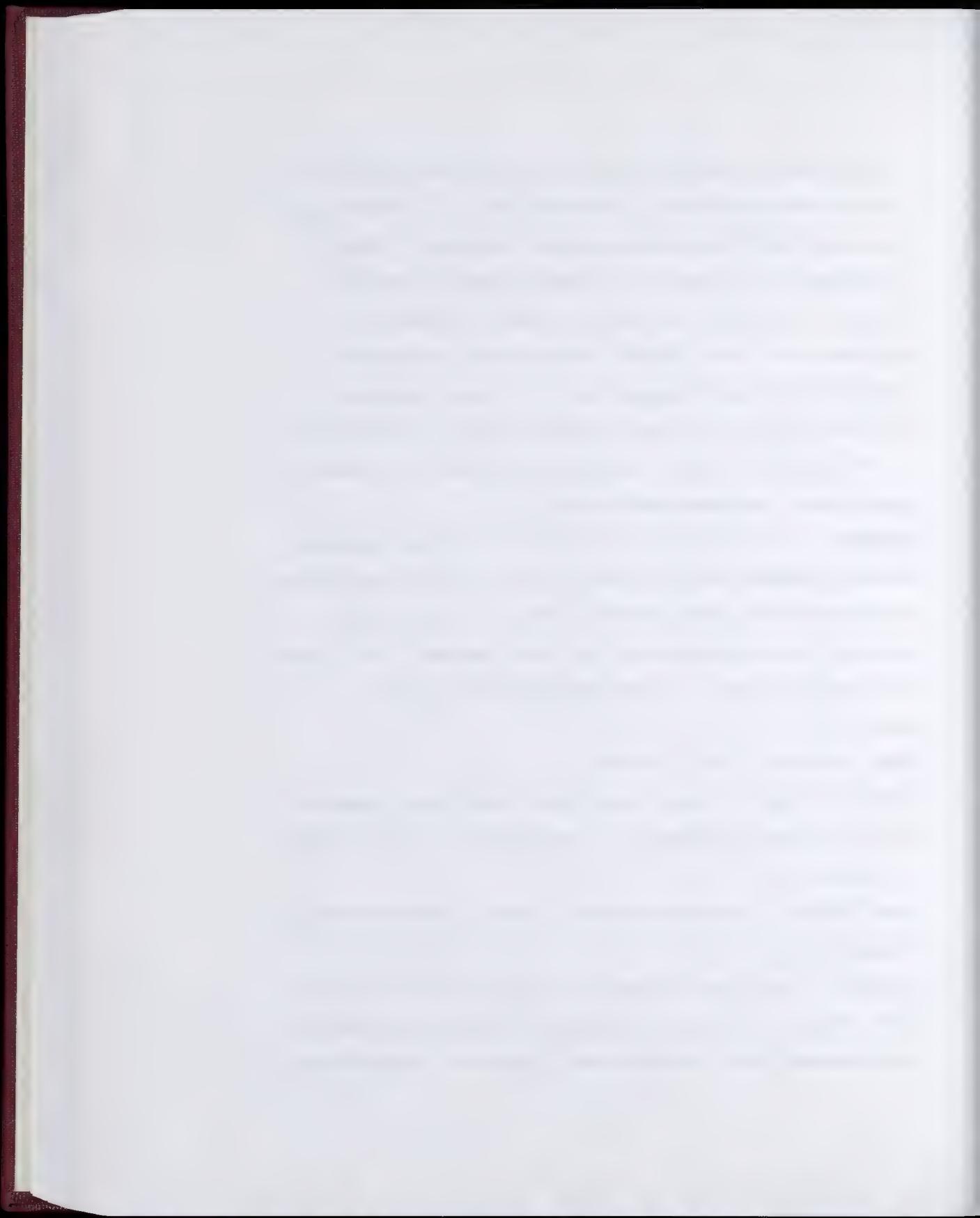
LEE: Vaguely. Well, somewhat.

GARDNER: Okay. I won't quiz you. The "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of--What?" is an article that you referred to yesterday.

LEE: Right. It's the one that I gave at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

GARDNER: Yes. The College Art Association [of America].

LEE: Right. It's sort of highly critical of the turning of a museum into a boutique and a place of entertainment



and so on. I felt very strongly, and I still do, about this. I think it's a pretty good speech. In fact, I must confess sometimes I get these things and after I look at them and read a few things out of it I say, "You know, that's awfully good. How did I think of that?"

[laughter]

GARDNER: [laughter] When you wrote these things, let me ask you this, as someone who writes, did anybody review them? Do you have anybody who served you as a sort of second pair of eyes or an editor or anything like that?

LEE: Well, for A History of Far Eastern Art, the fourth edition and now the fifth edition, I have a very good editor, Naomi [Noble] Richard.

GARDNER: For these essays, as you prepare a speech, is there anybody to look over the speech to--?

LEE: No. I would occasionally ask Miss [Jo] Zuppan, [Merald E.] Wrolsted's assistant in the publications department, to just take a quick look and see if there were any major boo-boos in terms of grammar or phraseology. In terms of content, I occasionally would ask Ed Henning to read an essay and see what he thought or my wife, who's very down-to-earth. She can keep me on the direct approach very well. But, in general, no. I didn't change an awful lot of the-- I write everything longhand on legal, yellow paper and with a pen. I cannot type, and

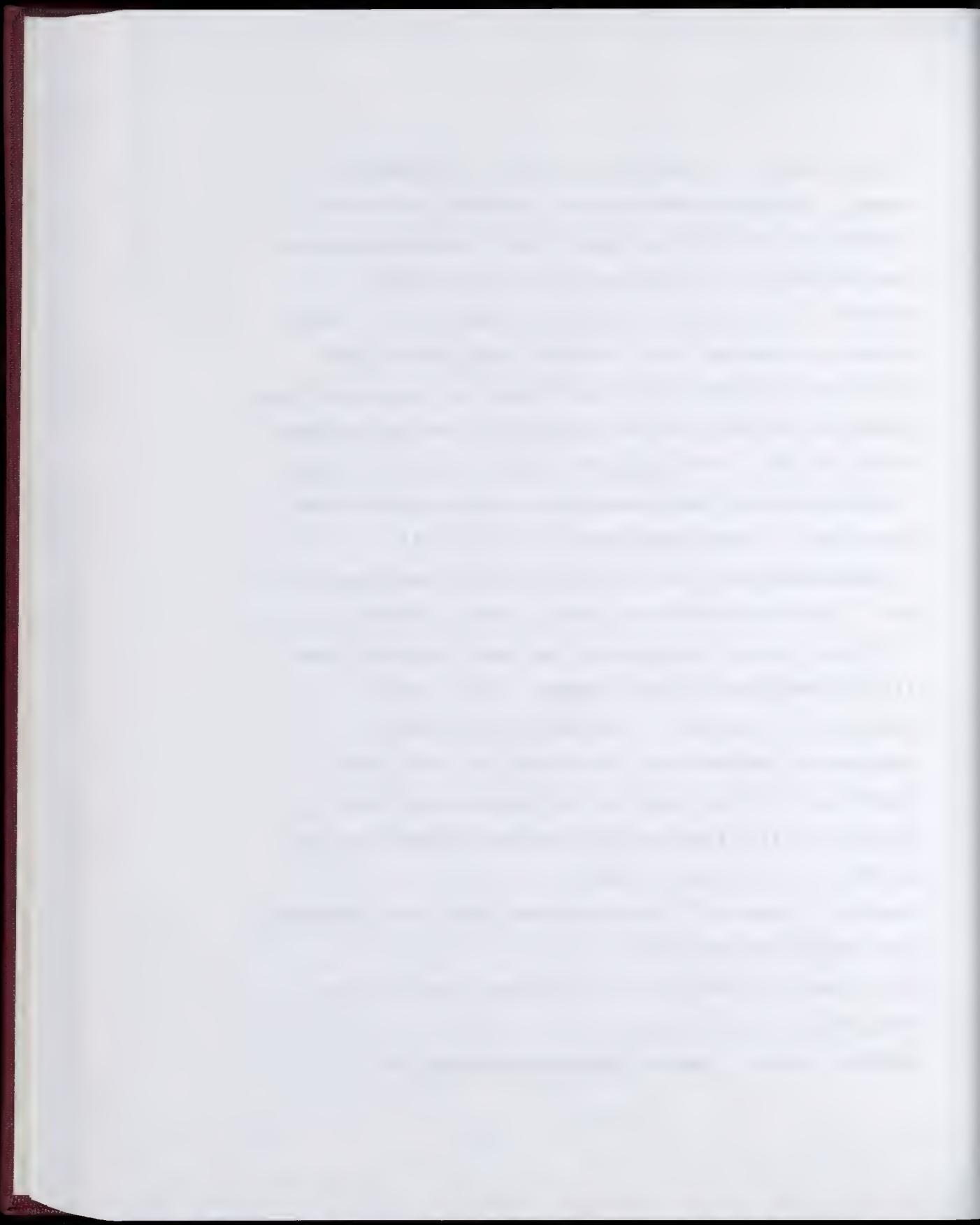


I still believe in [Henri] Focillon's "In Praise of Hands." I believe there's a very definite connection between the mechanical process of writing and moving your arms and so forth and the operation of your brain. There's an essay by the English philosopher R. G. [Robin George] Collingwood which is about piano playing and music, in which the connection between the movement of the hands and the piano and the case of the feet and the body-- Which you don't really use when you're writing, but still the connection of the movement of a human being and the human being's constituent parts, which are all interconnected with the brain and with the emotions and so on. I think it's what make people human. Frankly, I know I'm remiss in not having taken two years out of my late life to learn how to use a computer. But, frankly, I'm glad that I never did. I may have once or twice experienced the twinge of regret for not having done something about the computer, but it goes away very quickly and it's replaced by a feeling of great ease and of delight at not having done it.

GARDNER: [laughter] Do you remember much about the essay "Art Museums and Education"?

LEE: Yes. This was the one, I believe, that was the foreword to the big volume.

GARDNER: Right. The Art Museum as Educator: [A



Collection of Studies as Guides to Practice and Policy].

It was put out by Art International. Can you talk a little bit about that? I'm especially interested since that was obviously a commitment and interest of yours from the beginning. I found the essay very interesting as well.

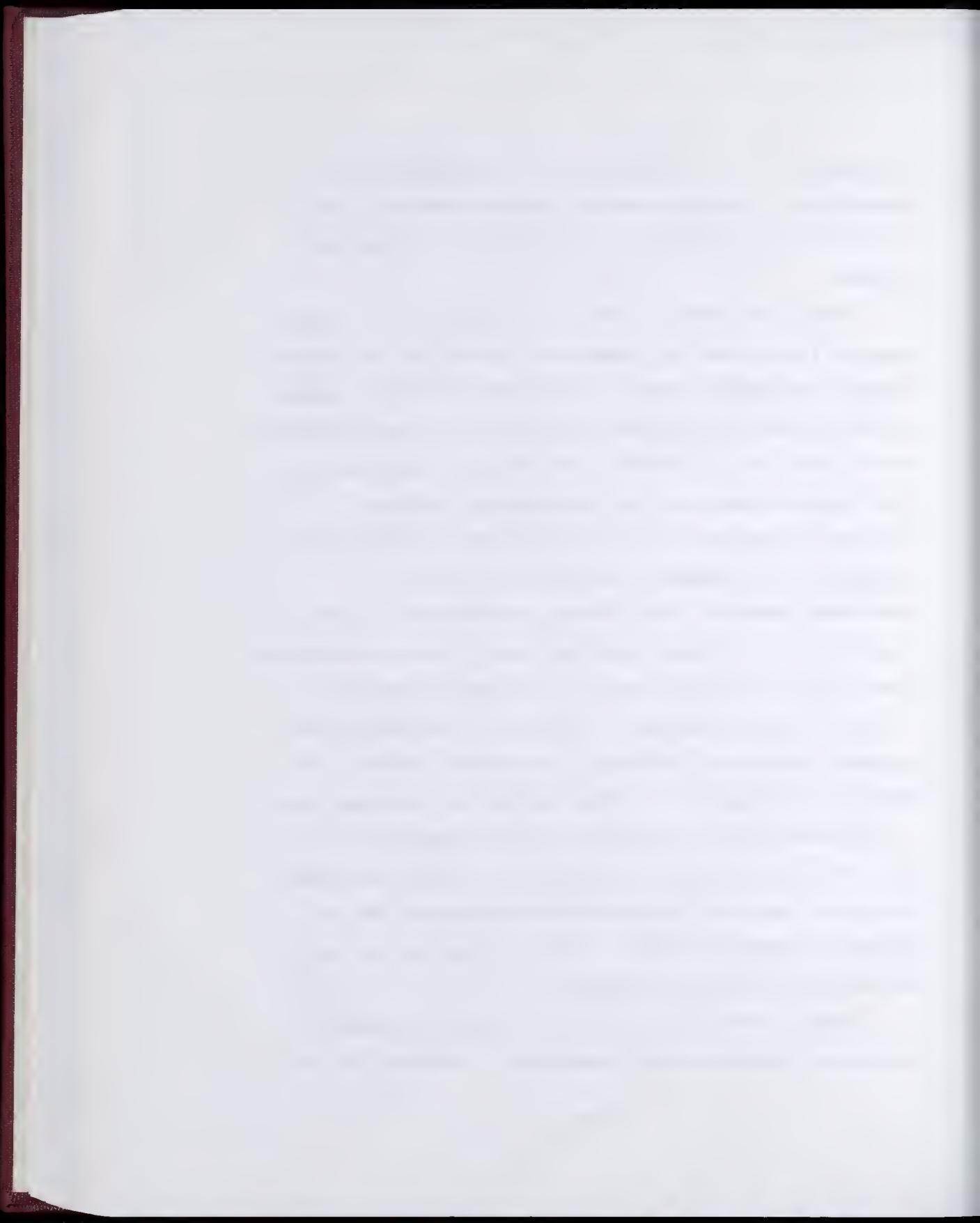
LEE: Well, having gone through an educational process, albeit not at one of the great educational institutions of the United States-- My primary education was in New York City in Brooklyn. I went to PS [public school] 177 and I graduated from PS 119--this was in the twenties. So then I went to public high school. I went to Brooklyn Technical High School for one semester and then I went to James Madison High School for one year. Then my family moved to Detroit. I went to a public high school, Cooley High School, for one year. And then the first high school--I may have mentioned this earlier, at the very beginning--where I was exposed to anything was Western High School in Washington, D.C. But my whole education and the most formative years of my life were in public school education. I remember courses in music appreciation. I remember courses in art appreciation. I also remember history courses. I remember the terrors of mathematics, and so on. And then I've had four years of undergraduate education at American University in



Washington [D.C.]. I had a year of graduate school in Washington. I had two years of graduate school. I've always been in an educational institution all the way through.

When I was taking my Ph.D. program in [Case] Western Reserve [University] in Cleveland, my wife put me through school. My father [Emery H. Lee] contributed too, because he would have to pay anyhow, and he was very understanding about that. But I worked in the education department at the Cleveland Museum of Art on Saturdays teaching children. They had a lot of high-powered people in that Carnegie grant program: the psychiatrist that I mentioned, Barnhart, and a Betty Lark-Horovitz. I was exposed to that. Tommy Munro was a big figure, and he had been a pupil of [John] Dewey's. So that all the way through I have always been a creature of the educational system, if you will, the public educational system. The educational department at Cleveland was an important part of the museum and had been from the very beginning. If you were alert, aware, and paying attention to what was going on, there was no way you could miss problems of education, whether it was children's education or adult education or continuing education.

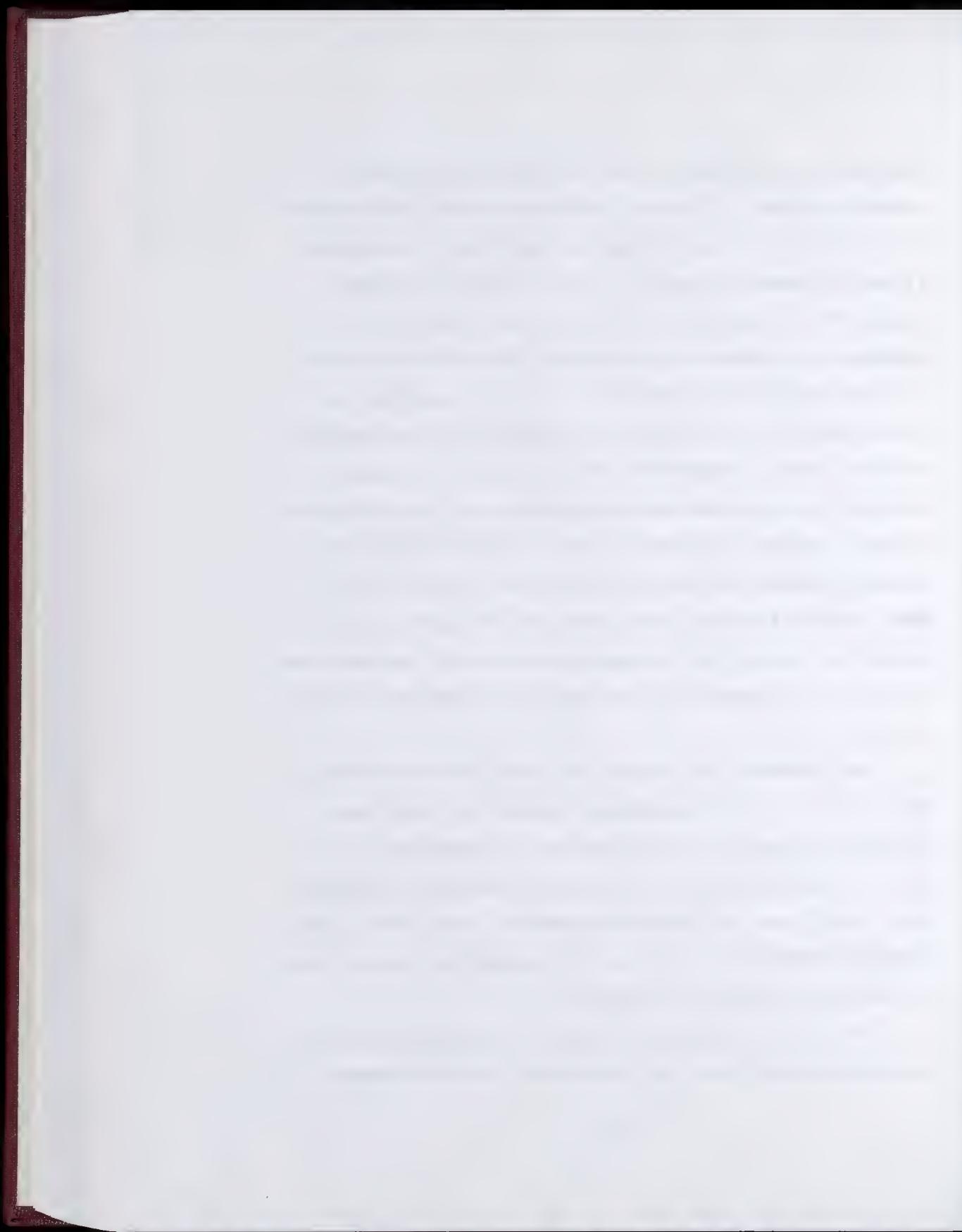
Since I have a certain amount of what I suppose we would call the missionary character-- I love art and art



has meant a great deal to me, all kinds of art and all kinds of places. I like to think that other people might enjoy it too. I know it takes a long time to understand it and do something about it, but I like to persuade people that's important. As one moves on after you graduate--you become a professional and you're working--you also realize something that you find recurring in these essays. People inside the field, the vast majority of them, simply forget that there are very few people outside the field who are interested in art seriously and who will support programs for the public schools, will support museums and museum exhibitions, publications. I mean, we can't always have people who are going to give us support so we can do the things that we feel are important to do, on the assumption that we're so bright and we're so special.

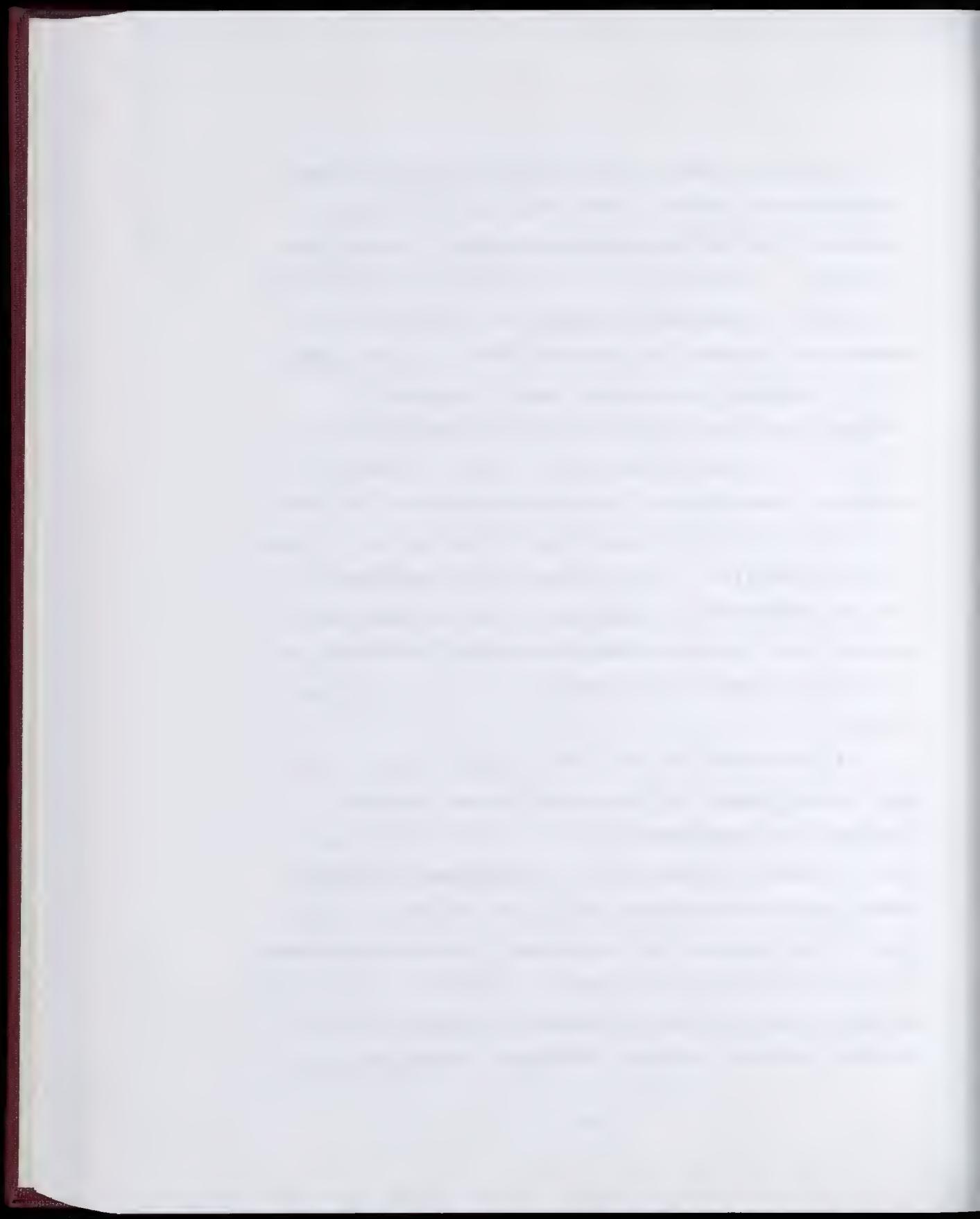
You remember the famous, the great elitist remark in World War I of the Cambridge or Oxford don, who, when asked why he wasn't in the trenches or something, said that he represented the civilization they were fighting for. Well, that is an elitist remark. Also, it's a very snobbish remark and it's also an insensitive remark. But it also has a degree of truth in it.

But if you're going to have art, the study of art, the enjoyment of art-- In connection with art--whether

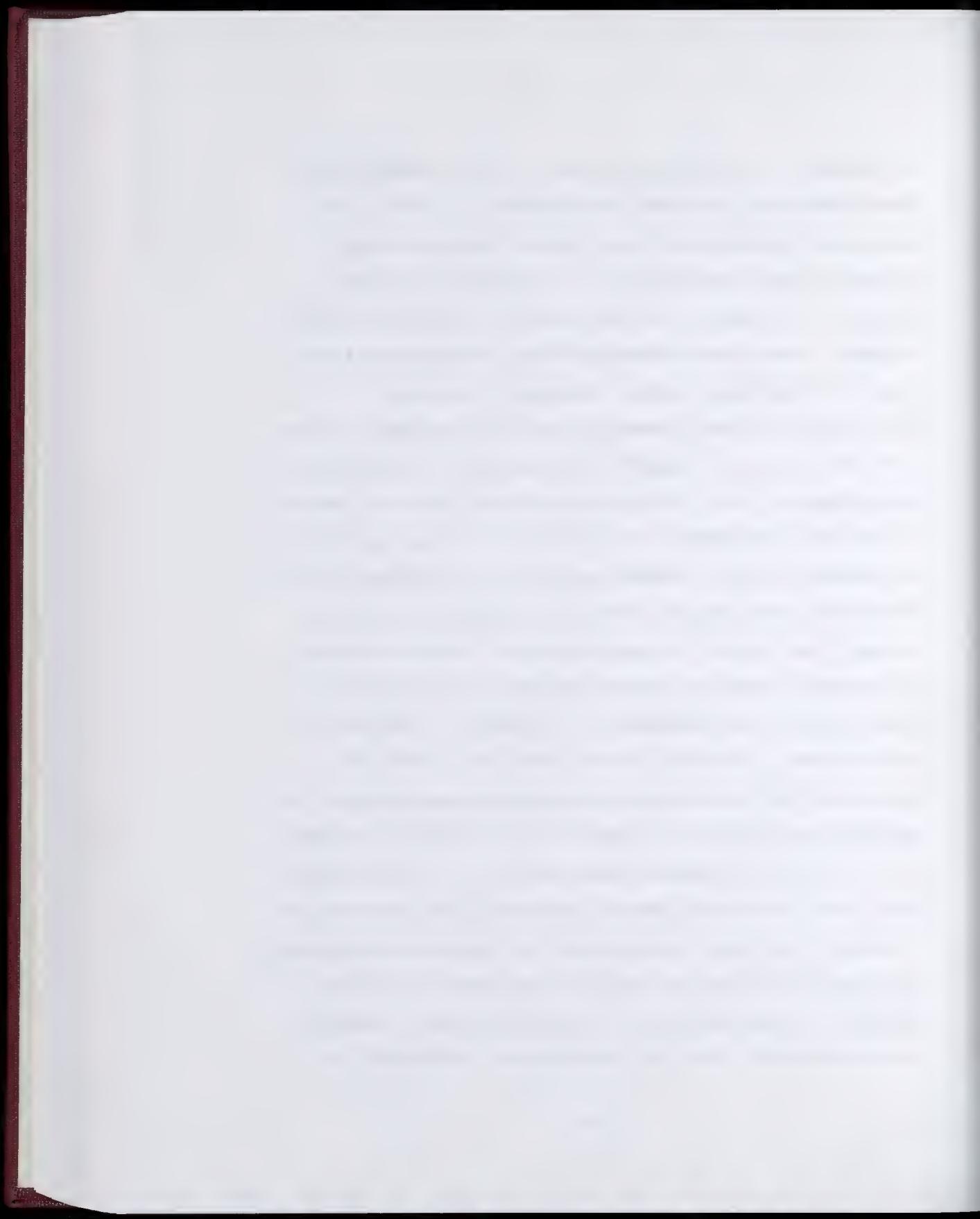


it's literary or poetry or art or music--I love the word "delectation." There's a book which was very, very important to me by the poet Richard Wilbur. It's a book of poetry. I think he's a very good poet. And the title of the book is This Way, Delight. Well, that struck a chord in my thinking and led me to look up, in what Tommy Munro's secretary once called "Roget's thoracis," "delight" and also to look up the Latin, delectare. I think it's a wonderful word, and I think it's what art provides. Sheer delight is another catchphrase, but that is really what it's all about, and I'm all for it. I love to study symbolism. I love to read about iconography. I love to understand the technology of how you make bronze casting, etc. But the ultimate purpose of the thing, if it's worth a damn or for anything at all, is to provide delight.

If you're going to have that continue, then you've got to have support and you've got to have educated, informed, and sympathetic support. That's why you have to have a degree of vulgarization, of propagandizing and so forth, without sacrificing quality and the things that make delight possible in the process. As for the business in "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of--What?"-- If in the process of getting people interested to support the arts, you kill the very nature of art itself, you've dug your



own grave. It's a funeral ceremony, not a celebration. That's why I'm interested in education. I went to the education conferences. Adele Silver, who was in the education department and is now the public relations person at the museum, and Dan [Daniel J.] Silver--who was a great, great rabbi--understood the importance and the need for educational work. When we did the big publication--Barbara Newsome in New York and Adele Silver with the editors--I worked with them and I observed what was going on. And I've tried to keep up with that aspect. I have said repeatedly, and I believe it absolutely, that as gradually the art market contracts and dwindles, as the financial resources get tighter, as the society gets bigger, that one of the most important functions of the art museum, which has become more important every year that this has been happening, is education. The weight has shifted. Collecting is now lower in priority to education, and museums should seize that opportunity. The schools should seize the opportunity of using the museums and of using the material from museums. I've often said that if we could ever develop something, not like the tea ceremony, not flower arrangement, but something comparable that could catch on and become a real part of American society, things would be an awful lot better. Because there's no doubt that you just have to look around you.



Just be observant and be honest and evaluate what you see. Art, the interest in art, is a minority interest. And therefore you must educate. Because in a democratic society, what the majority is going to be interested in is the thing that is going to prevail. So do it.

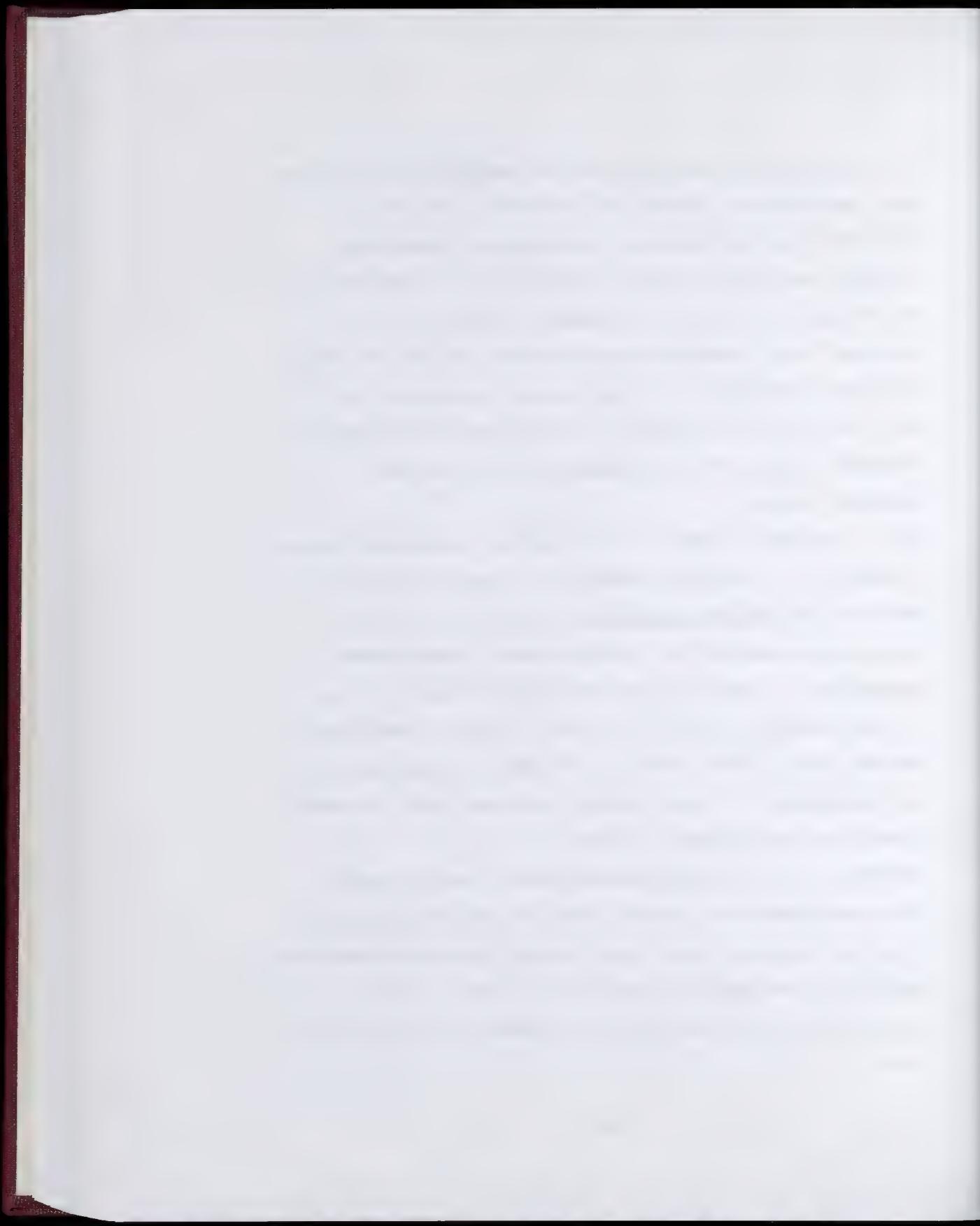
GARDNER: Well, shall we leave the book now or are there any other comments you'd like to make pertaining to it?

LEE: Well, just one thing. "The Art Museum in Today's Society" began with the "Lamentations of Jeremiah."

GARDNER: Right.

LEE: That was a given. A first given, immediately after [Thomas P. F.] Hoving's accession to the throne and his doing of the Harlem on My Mind exhibition, and boy, I meant every word of it. I still think I mean almost everything. I think it may have been perhaps a little of an overreaction. But, I tell you, it made a sensation in Dayton, Ohio. They loved it. It was very much praised and applauded. I think it didn't go over with the avant-garde, but that's their problem.

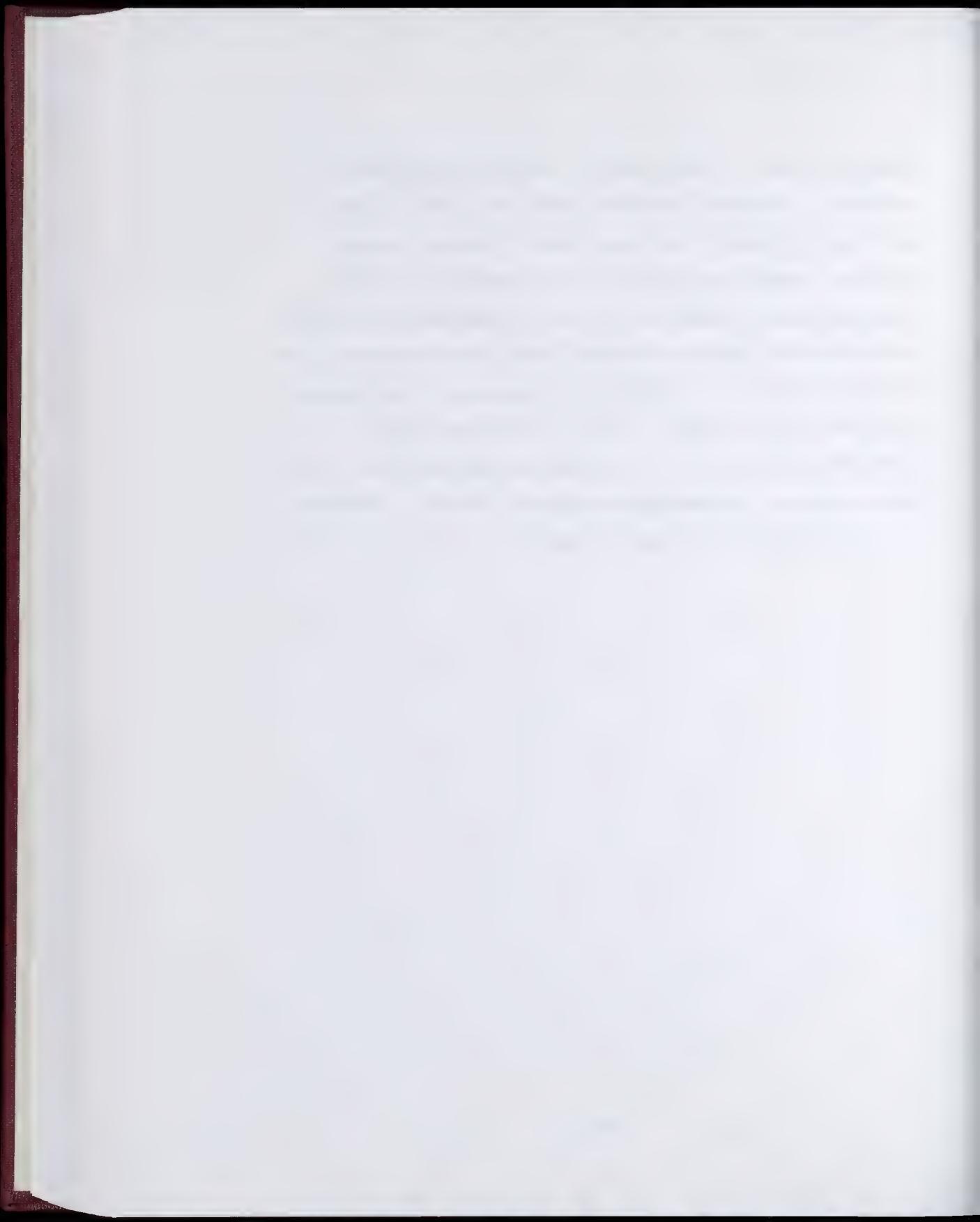
GARDNER: Yes. The avant-garde doesn't read Jeremiah. There was something I read I guess in the article about you, that appeared about your leaving, about the Temple of Dendur and having to do with the-- I thought, since we were talking about Hoving at this point, you would want to--



LEE: Well, that's very interesting. For a while, for a period of years, our curator of Egyptian art--ancient art, but he was primarily an Egyptologist--was Jack [John D.] Cooney, who had been the curator of Egyptology at the Brooklyn Museum and was a very fine connoisseur of Egyptian art. He was knowledgeable, scholarly, but basically a very fine connoisseur. Jack had a wicked sense of humor, and he couldn't stand Hoving and the policies he represented. I think he also was a little bit suspicious of some of the people in the ancient art area in the big city. Anyhow, the Egyptian government was making this gorgeous gesture to the United States by giving the Temple of Dendur to be placed in a conspicuous location for educational purposes and understanding of ancient Egypt. The Smithsonian [Institution] had wanted it badly. The Metropolitan wanted it badly. I don't remember exactly. I think Boston was not all that keen about it. But it had to go to some big population center. And Jack Cooney was on the committee that was appointed, I think, by the Smithsonian to decide and make recommendations for the location of the Temple of Dendur. Well, Jack and I have discussed this many, many times. The Temple of Dendur is a very late, very uncharacteristic, very debased-- In terms of quality, it may not be D-, but it's certainly not better than D+. It's very big. It



poses problems of conservation, because if you have it outside in a modern American industrial, city climate, it will go to pieces in no time. Well, it was, in our opinion, Jack's and mine, a white elephant. So the question didn't become which institution should receive the wonderful Temple of Dendur. The question became, for the committee, which institution was going to be saddled with the white elephant. And I think Jack took considerable pleasure in influencing the committee to give the temple to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I thought it was a kind of nice, poetic gesture.

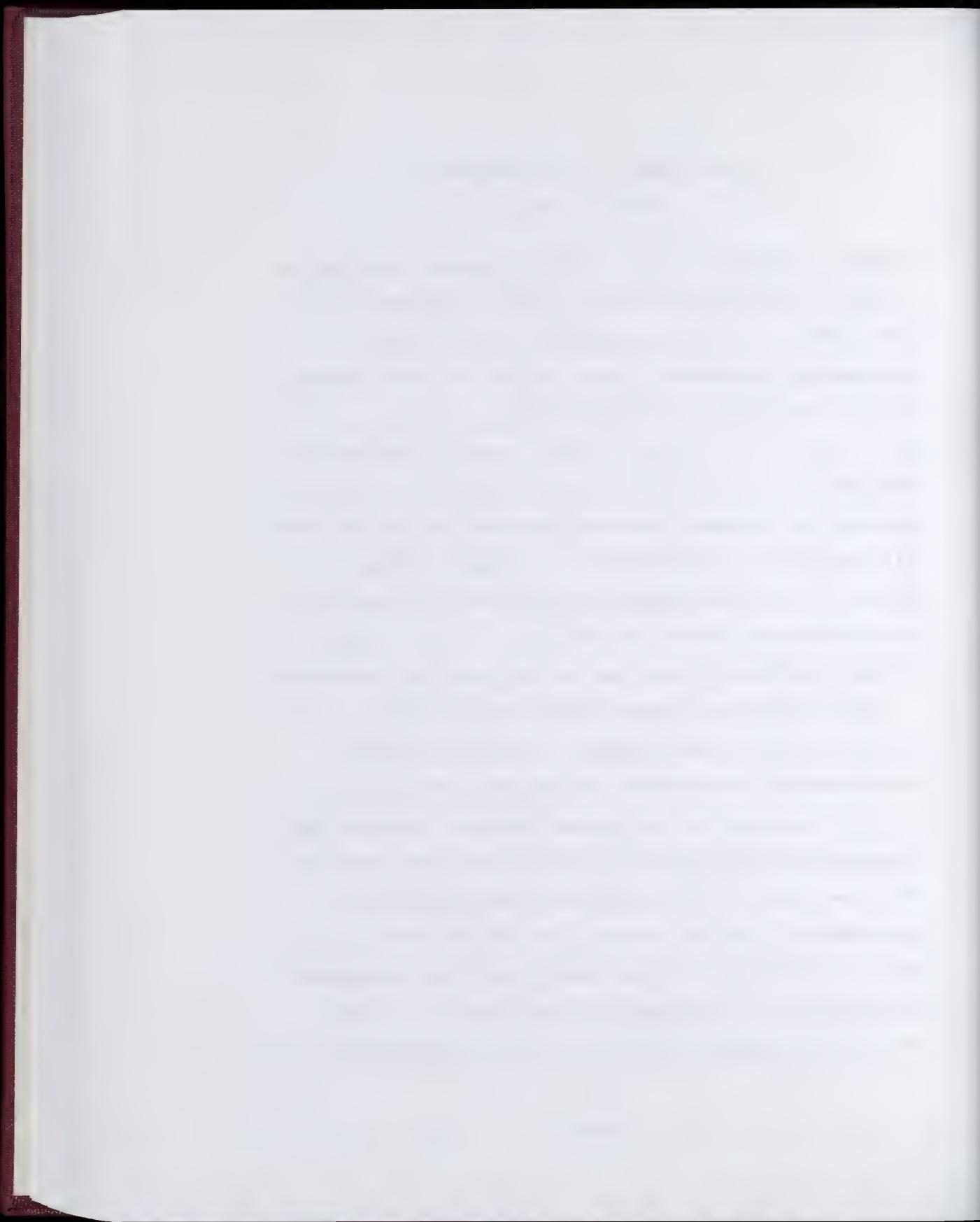


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JULY 16, 1992

GARDNER: The first area I'd like to discuss today is the nature of scholarship vis-à-vis museum directors. As I commented to you off tape yesterday, your record of publication is enormous. First of all, is that something that's common among museum directors?

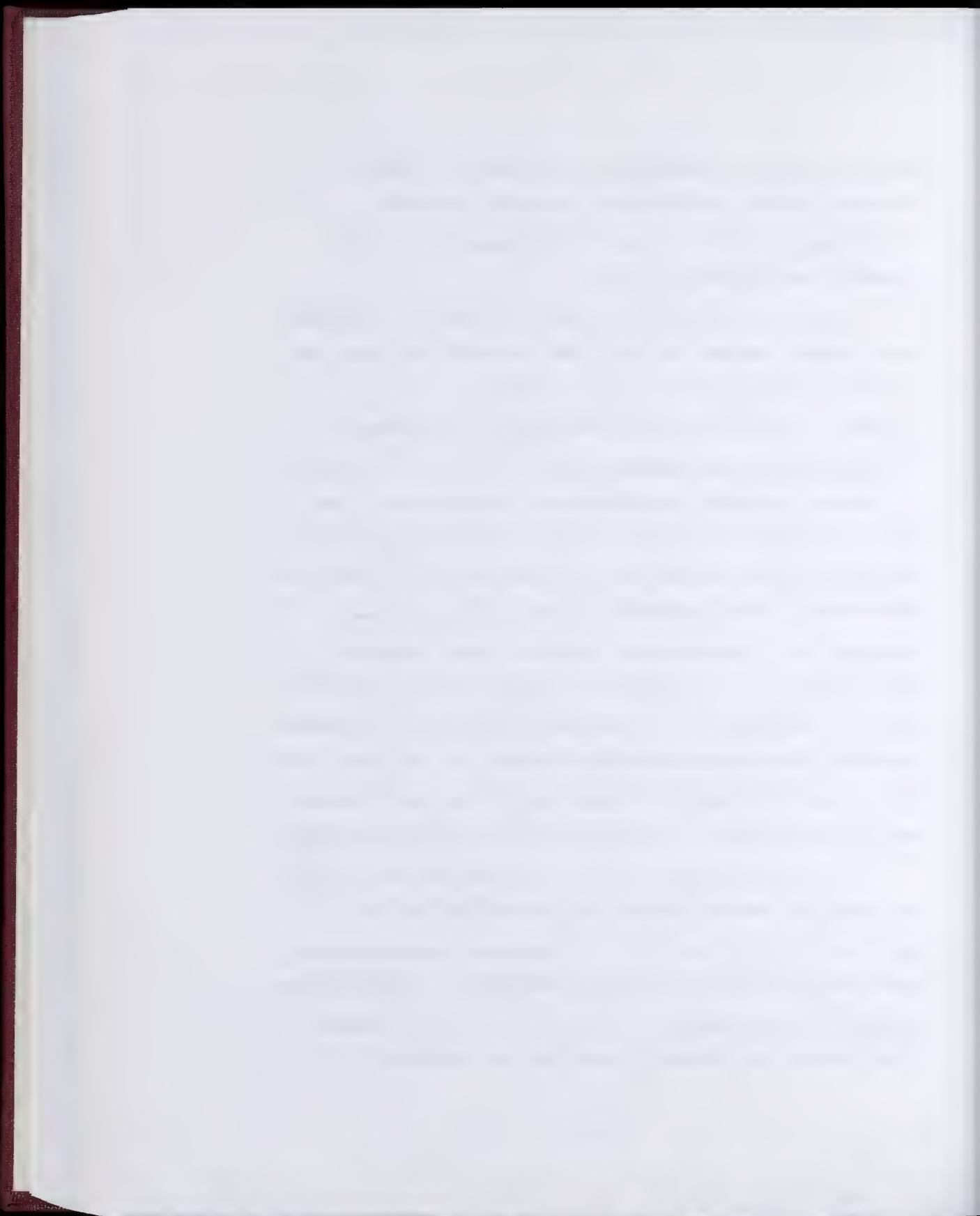
LEE: Well, no. It isn't. By and large, it has not been the practice, at least as far as I know, in the history of American art museums for museum directors to be publishing all that much. I'm sure that, for example, Herbert [E.] Winlock, who was an Egyptologist who was the director of the Metropolitan Museum [of Art] back in the thirties, of course, published a great deal in the field of Egyptology. I think he published somewhat less when he became director. George Harold Edgell, who was director of Boston Museum [of Fine Arts] in the early thirties, wrote a book, a general book on Sienese painting [A History of Sienese Painting], which I think was very well received at the time. But I don't think there were too many other publications. But he certainly was one who did publish. Then Daniel Catton Rich, who was a very fine director at [Art Institute of] Chicago for many years in the late thirties or forties, wrote quite a bit on the field. He



was particularly interested in the field of modern art, and also he was interested in what they now call "museology," the activities and philosophies of art museums, and he wrote on that.

Larry [Laurence] Sickman was the director at Kansas City [Nelson Gallery of Art], and of course his name has cropped up very often in our conversation. He wrote probably the best single-volume history of Chinese art [The Art and Architecture of China] with Alex [Alexander C.] Soper, who wrote the section on architecture. The book was marred by the fault of the publishing firm. It was part of the Pelican series of the history of art, and the British, with characteristic Western prejudice, included only architecture, sculpture, and painting in their series. So in dealing with China without dealing with the decorative arts--ceramics and metalwork, Chinese bronzes--that hampered the completeness of the book. But it's a wonderful book. Sickman was a director. He also wrote a few articles, but he didn't really publish much.

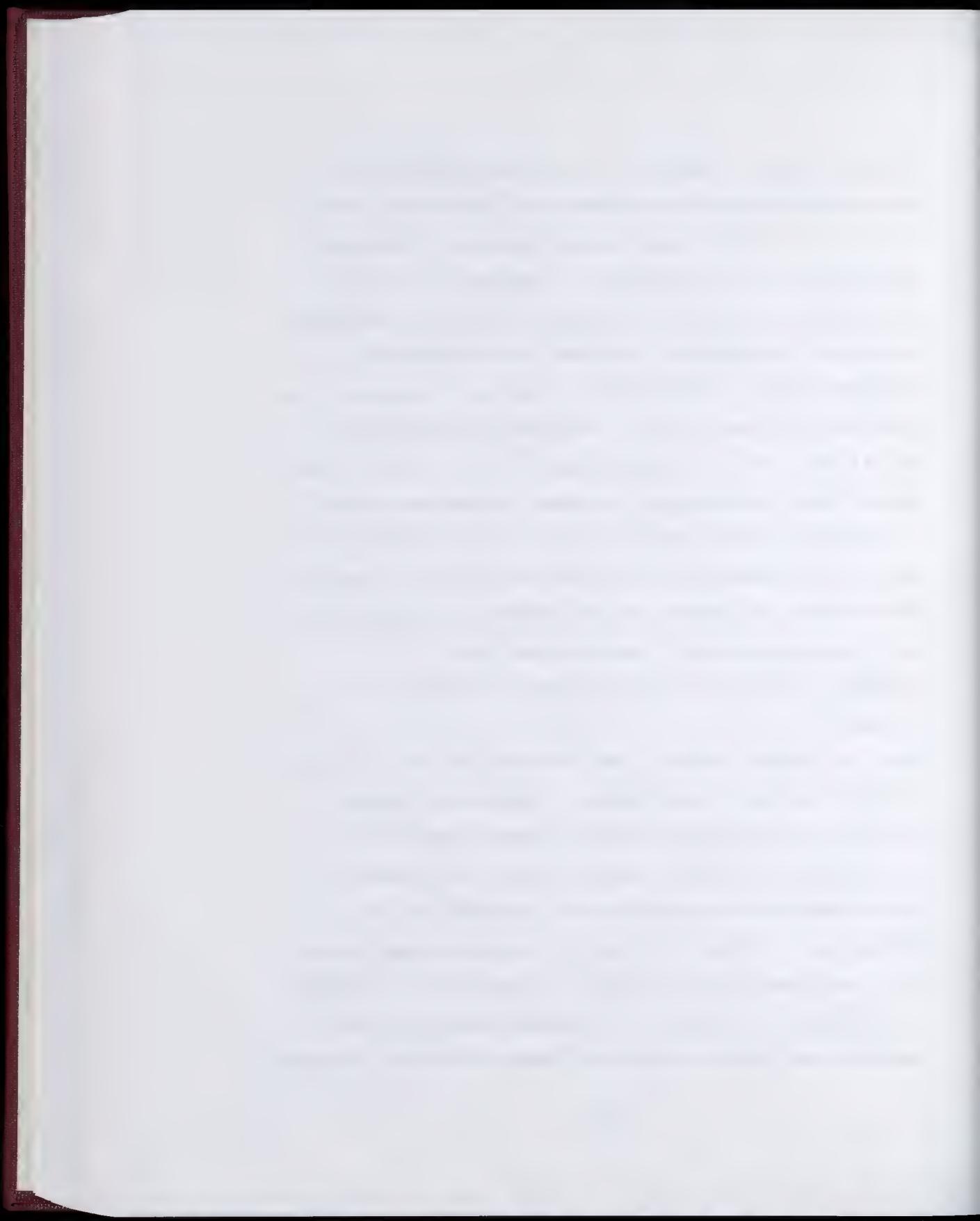
It is hard to think of a lot of serious publication or even just decent popular publication on the part of most museum directors. All of the museum directors who have been most effective in the early days of American art museums in the twenties, thirties, and forties--people like "Chick" [A. Everett] Austin at the Wadsworth



Atheneum--didn't publish. He just bought wonderful baroque paintings before anybody ever thought of doing it, and so on. By and large, museum directors in the past, certainly up until the fifties, came from a relatively closed club of Harvard [University]-, Yale [University]-, Princeton [University]-, NYU [New York University]- educated people. More Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. And they basically had A.B.'s. Very few had doctorates, if any at that time. It simply wasn't part of the job, as it were. These things began to change as museums in the fifties and sixties began to try to close the gap, which was a very substantial gap in the thirties, in terms of self-respect and mutual respect between the academic world and the museum world. [tape recorder off]

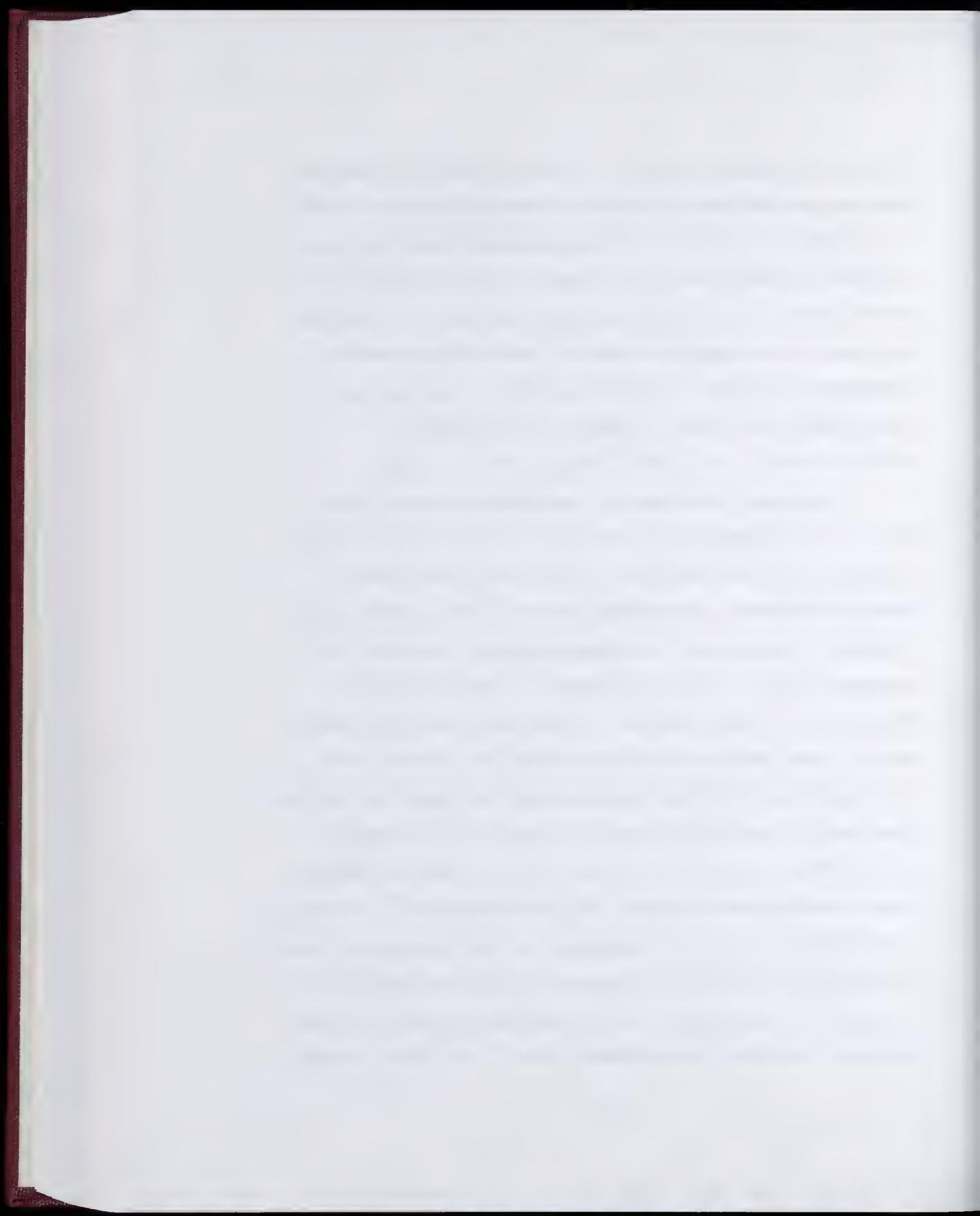
GARDNER: You were talking and comparing museum and academic--

LEE: Oh, right. Right. And this sort of lack of mutual respect was really very severe. The academic people thought the museum people were flibbertigibbets and dilettantes. The museum people thought the academic people were pedants and wedded to the book and the photograph. I think World War II was a dividing line in many, many ways for many things: oriental art, museums, art history. I think that as museums began to be more serious about their educational responsibilities and their



scholarly responsibilities, as the art market became more complex and the exhibition situation became more complex and as expertise became more specialized--more and more information, more and more objects, etc.--the need of the museum side for the scholarship of the academic side and the need on the academic side for the exposure and the influence, in terms of general public influence, sort of reinforced each other. There began to be some reconciliation, as it were, between the two sides.

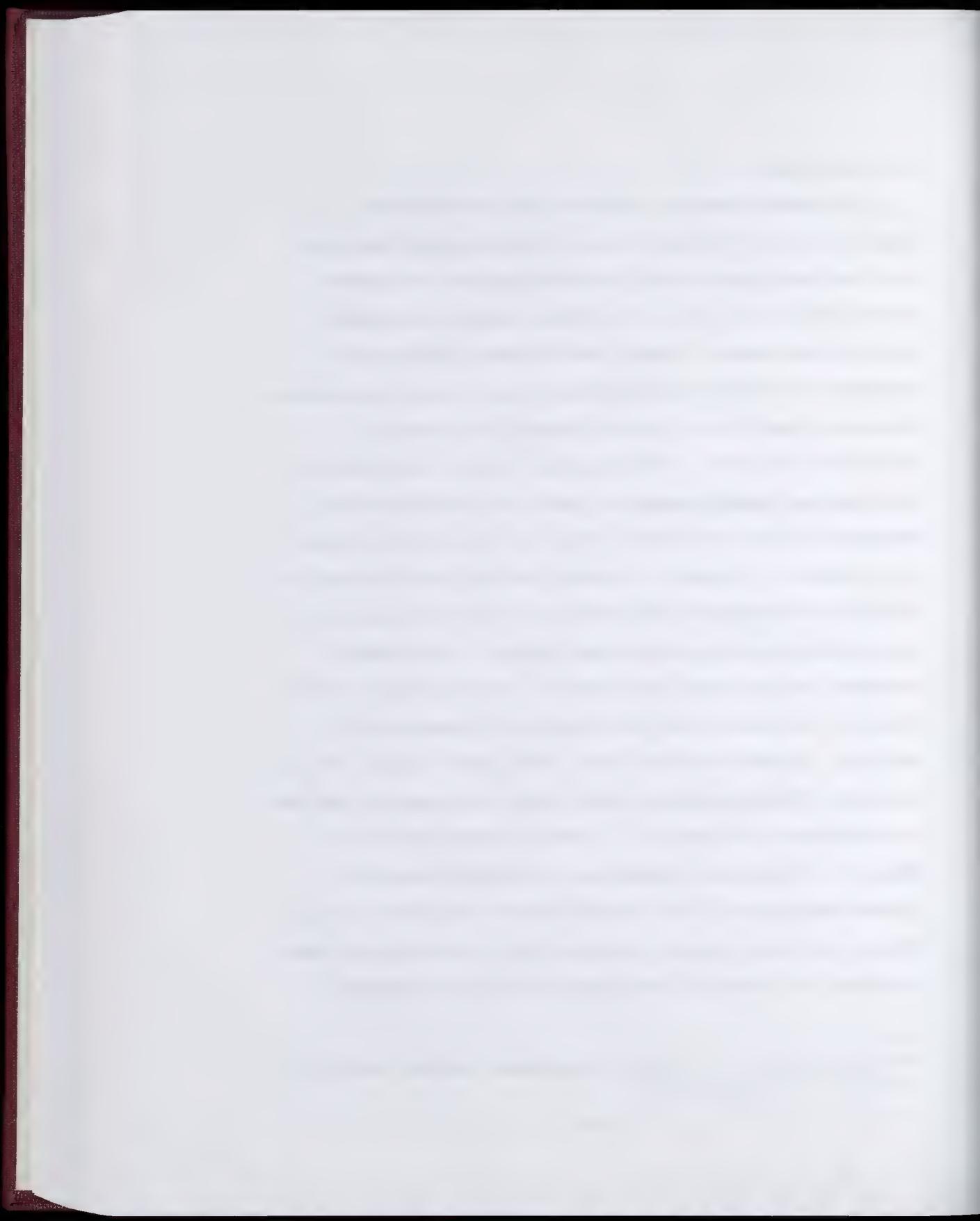
In my case, for example, accident had a lot to do with it. You studied art history if you were interested in art in college, and then if you were interested in going on further, in graduate school. That was basically oriented to producing a college professor to enter the academic world. And the Depression, the years of the thirties and then World War II--and then even after World War II, when there was the aftermath, as it were--meant that sometimes the jobs were not all that easy to find and some people moved into something outside the academic world. Some people even--"even," that shows the mind-set right away--became dealers. It was accidental, I think as I mentioned at the very beginning of this interview, that I finally did get into the museum world, because I just accidentally was able to get a much better position than the one I could in the academic world. So these things



all play a part.

In recent years--I mean the last two decades, especially even the last ten or fifteen years--you have more and more people with graduate degrees who became museum directors, but on the whole, again, they didn't publish that much. I mean, for instance, [David W.] Steadman at Toledo [Museum of Art] was an excellent museum director, has a Ph.D. in art history, but has not published very much. The directors that I have known at Los Angeles [County Museum of Art], at [the Fine Arts Museums of] San Francisco-- Well, in the oriental field, for instance, [Yvonne] D'Argencé, who was the director at the Asian Art Museum [San Francisco] some time ago, had published some very substantial things. The present director of the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco is Rand Castile, who used to be the director at Japan House Gallery. He has written a very, very good book on the tea ceremony [The Way of Tea], but, again, not much in the way of additional publication. *[And of course there was Edgar P. Richardson on American painting at Detroit, already mentioned.] So I would have to say that on the whole, certainly museum directors don't publish very much. Curators, in terms of their relationship to academic

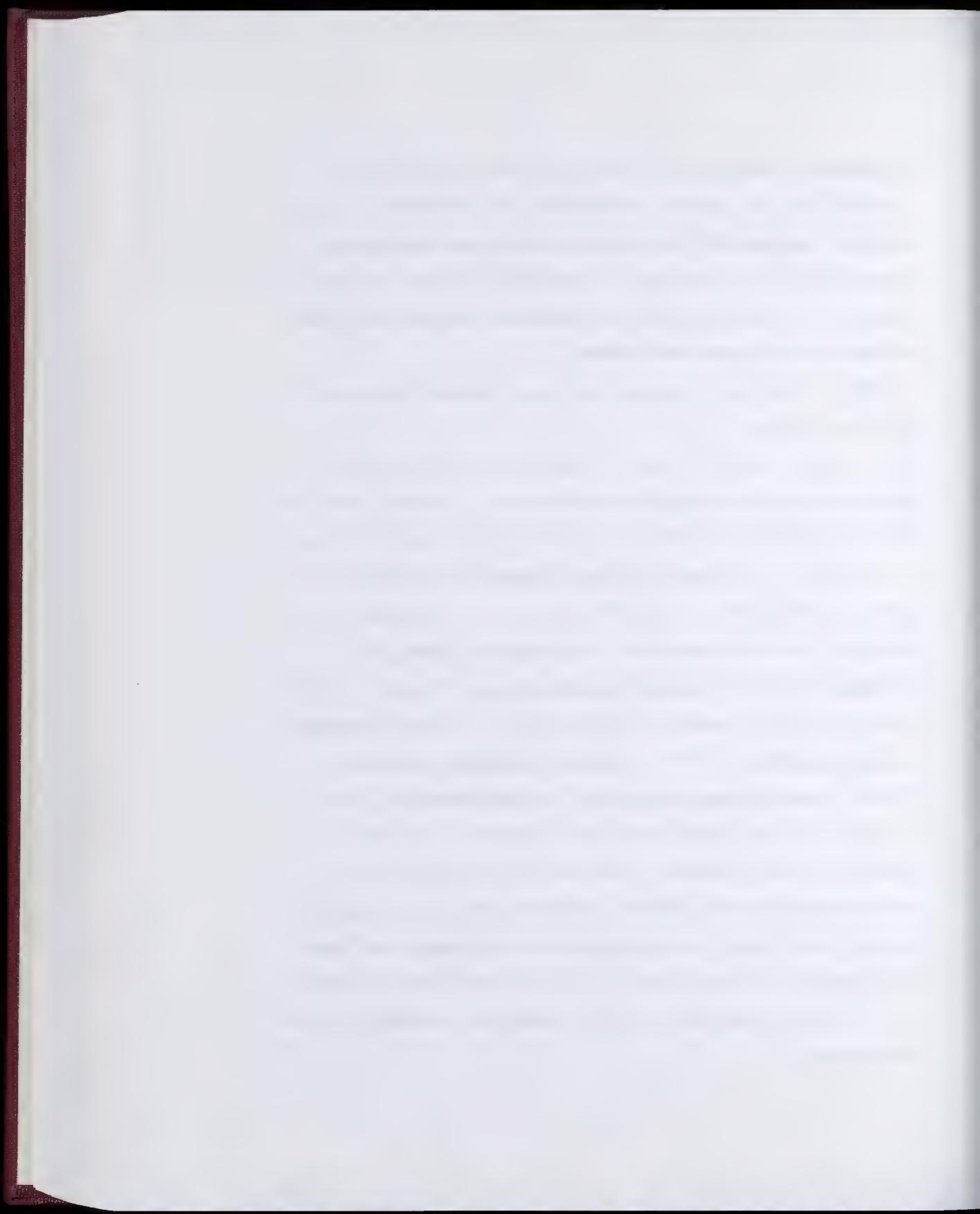
* Lee added the following bracketed section during his review of the transcript.



personnel, probably have come up a lot, but they still probably do not publish as much as the university people, in part because of the pressures of simple day-to-day operations of any museum in curatorial matters and partly because the opportunities for extended and concentrated research are not so much there.

GARDNER: How were you able to be so prolific and still run the museum?

LEE: Well, first of all, if you look at the list of publications in a relatively rapid way, I think there are a few very serious scholarly publications that I've been involved in. A History of Far Eastern Art [1964] is a general book, but I think it's sound. It's going to be sounder in a fifth edition. Chinese Art under the Mongols: [The Art of the Yüan Dynasty, 1279-1368] (1968)] was, I think, a genuine contribution. I think Japanese Decorative Style [1961], Chinese Landscape Painting [1954], Reflections of Reality [in Japanese Art] (1983)] all in their way made what can be called, I think, a scholarly contribution. But the kind of a big, fully documented scholarly study, intended really for experts within the field, is not conspicuously present on that bibliography of mine, and I would be the first to admit it. I was always sort of in between the academic and the museum world.



Wherever I went, I tried to teach, as well as being in the museum. I like teaching. I like students. I also like to feel that I'm contributing to the educational effort in making the arts, and oriental art specifically, more available, more accessible to the educated and interested lay public. In order to do that-- My wife [Ruth Ward Lee] is very patient. When I was much younger, I really burned the midnight oil a great deal. I always had a room to study where I could work undisturbed. I just did an awful lot. Being a museum director made certain things much easier, as I have found out to my sorrow in retirement. You have secretarial help whenever you want it. You have library help wherever you-- You have help in the slide department. That is, you don't have to go and pick out each one of your slides piece by piece. And you have colleagues in your own field-- expertise--who you can discuss things with, you can get advice from, you can propose ideas and get criticism, and that's all very helpful. But still you've got to write it and you've got to do the research and be familiar with the literature. You've got to take your notes. You've got to do everything you're supposed to do. And that takes time. That means you have to do it outside of museum hours. As a curator, you can do it on museum time. As a director, you don't really have the time to do it. But it gets done

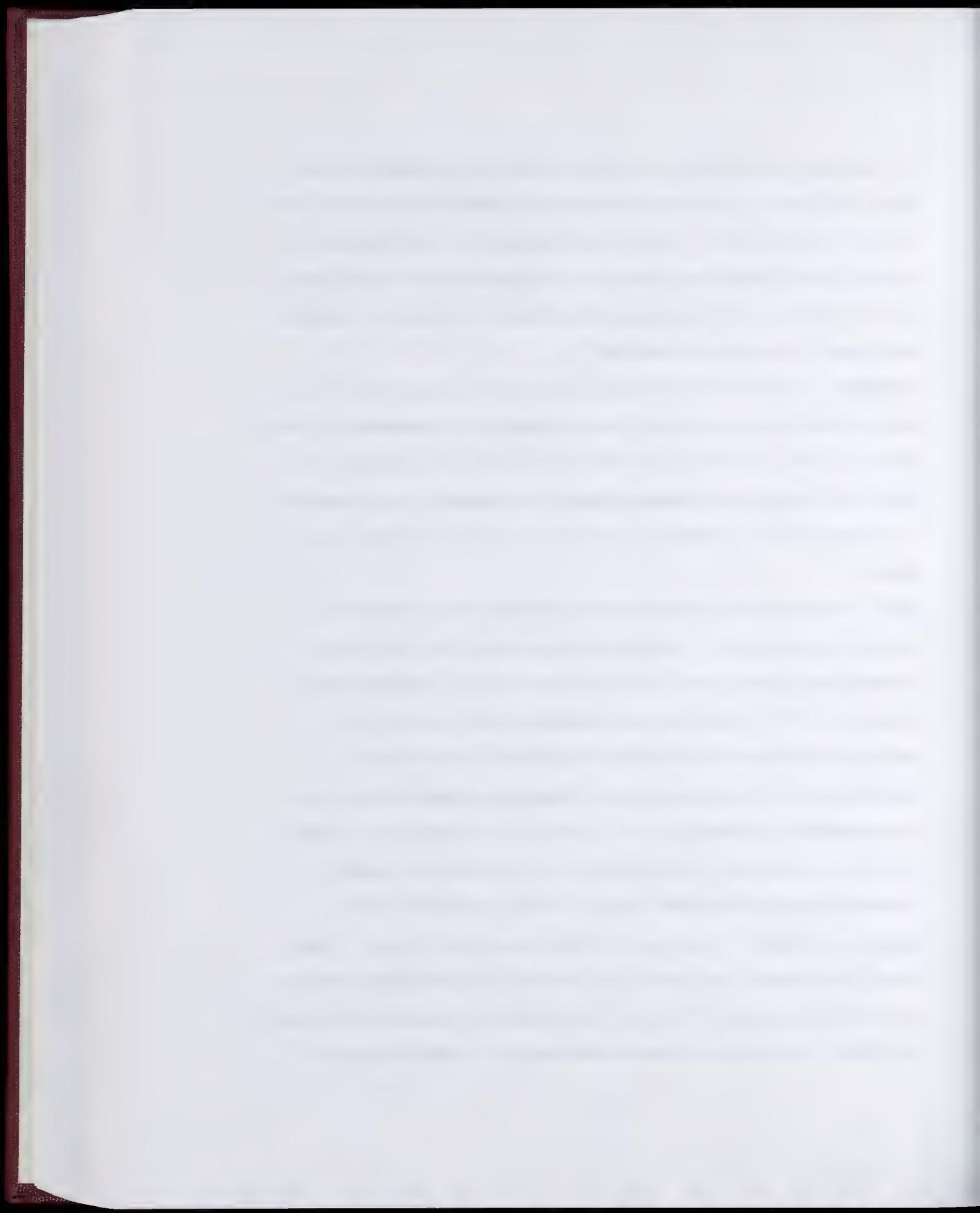


if you are interested in doing it and have enough energy and, as I said, have a patient and a very helpful wife who doesn't share other people's enthusiasm for going out to dinner every night or going to this occasion or that party and so forth. We've always been home and family oriented.

And that's the way it worked.

GARDNER: To move from there, since we've started to talk about the relationship of museum people to academics-- The other night you mentioned that you'd like to discuss this sort of triangle of museum people, academics, and dealers. I would be interested to hear what you have to say about them.

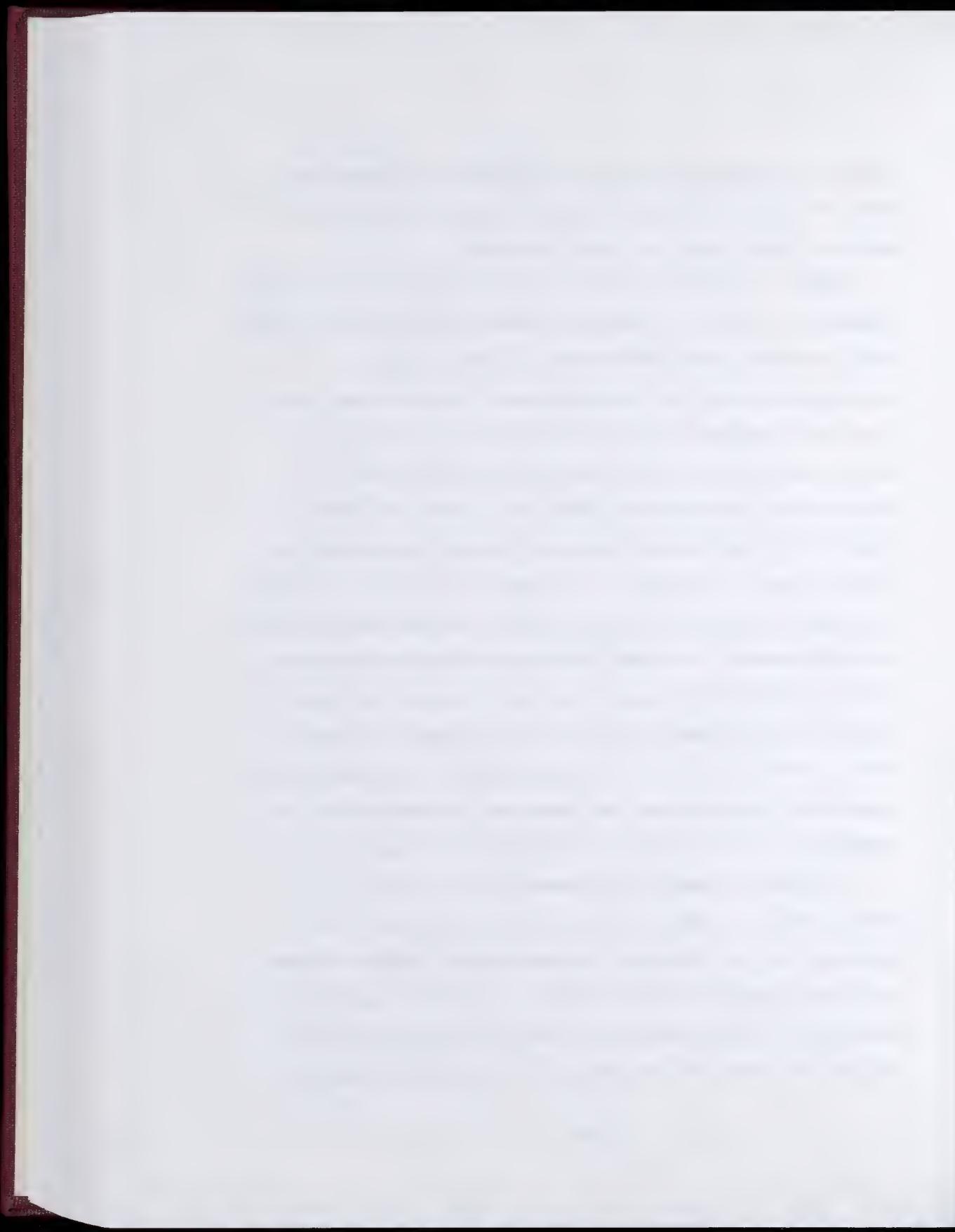
LEE: Art museums in the United States are a relatively recent development. One can make a case for the first museum being way back in Philadelphia with Charles Wilson Peale in 1797. But the art museum as we know it, the endowed institution or state-supported institution dedicated to the acquisition, display, preservation, and elucidation of works of art, really is a product of post-Civil War America. Boston and the Metropolitan were founded almost the same time, I think in 1870, if my memory is right. Each one thinks they were first. They were both about the same. Of course, the National Gallery [of Art] is later. The Art Institute of Chicago goes back to 1879. But the earliest institutions were basically



formed by wealthy, cultured, well-educated citizens who wished to have a cultural amenity represented by an art museum in their city, in their location.

That's a little different from the kind of thing that happened in, let's say, Germany, where museums really didn't begin to become vital and developing and growing institutions until the late nineteenth century, and then under state support and with the help from patrons, of course, but also with the use of public funds for acquisition. [Wilhelm von] Bode was a voracious museum director for the Kaiser-Friedrich-[Museum] and bought an enormous amount of material. In England, you had a longer tradition of aristocratic patronage in collecting in the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, the days of the European tour. It was absolutely de rigueur for an aristocrat to travel in Europe and bring back artistic evidence that he'd been there. That's how a lot of the collections, places like the Fitzwilliam [Museum] and the Ashmolean [Museum of Art and Archaeology] and the National Gallery, developed at first.

With the increase of endowment and with the participation in some cases, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of the city in operations-- [tape recorder off] With governmental participation, the Metropolitan Museum gets a very substantial amount of money from the city of New York for its operations, utilities, and so



forth, guards and other things. Museums became increasingly professional: that is, the director of the Boston museum was an expert on Sienese painting; the director of the Metropolitan Museum, in the case of Winlock, was an Egyptologist; Jim [James J.] Rorimer, who was a very important director of the Metropolitan, was an expert in medieval art, and so on. Staffs began to develop as well as curatorial expertise, and you had an institution that was, in the first three quarters of the twentieth century, developing and acquiring by gift or by purchase. There was a very conscious sense of competition with England, France, Germany, Italy, because we wanted to get our museums up to snuff, as it were. So there was a definite drive and a definite bias towards the acquisition part of the museum situation. Also, it's the most exciting and the most psychologically gratifying in terms of helping to assuage greed and the acquisitive instincts and so forth. It's the glamorous part of museum operations. And it was dominant. That's the museum world in the early twentieth century.

The academic world, on the other hand, was-- Again, like the museum, many of the professors at the major institutions having to do with the history of art-- Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Institute of Fine Arts [New York University]--were professors who were second sons or third



sons of wealthy families. There was definitely a genteel tradition in that group. They spent their summers abroad. It was part of an American genteel tradition. At the same time, it was scholarly, and it also considered itself above the hurly-burly of the marketplace which would be the dealer's world or the marketplace which would also be the museum world, because the museum world was in that up to their necks because of the acquisition process.

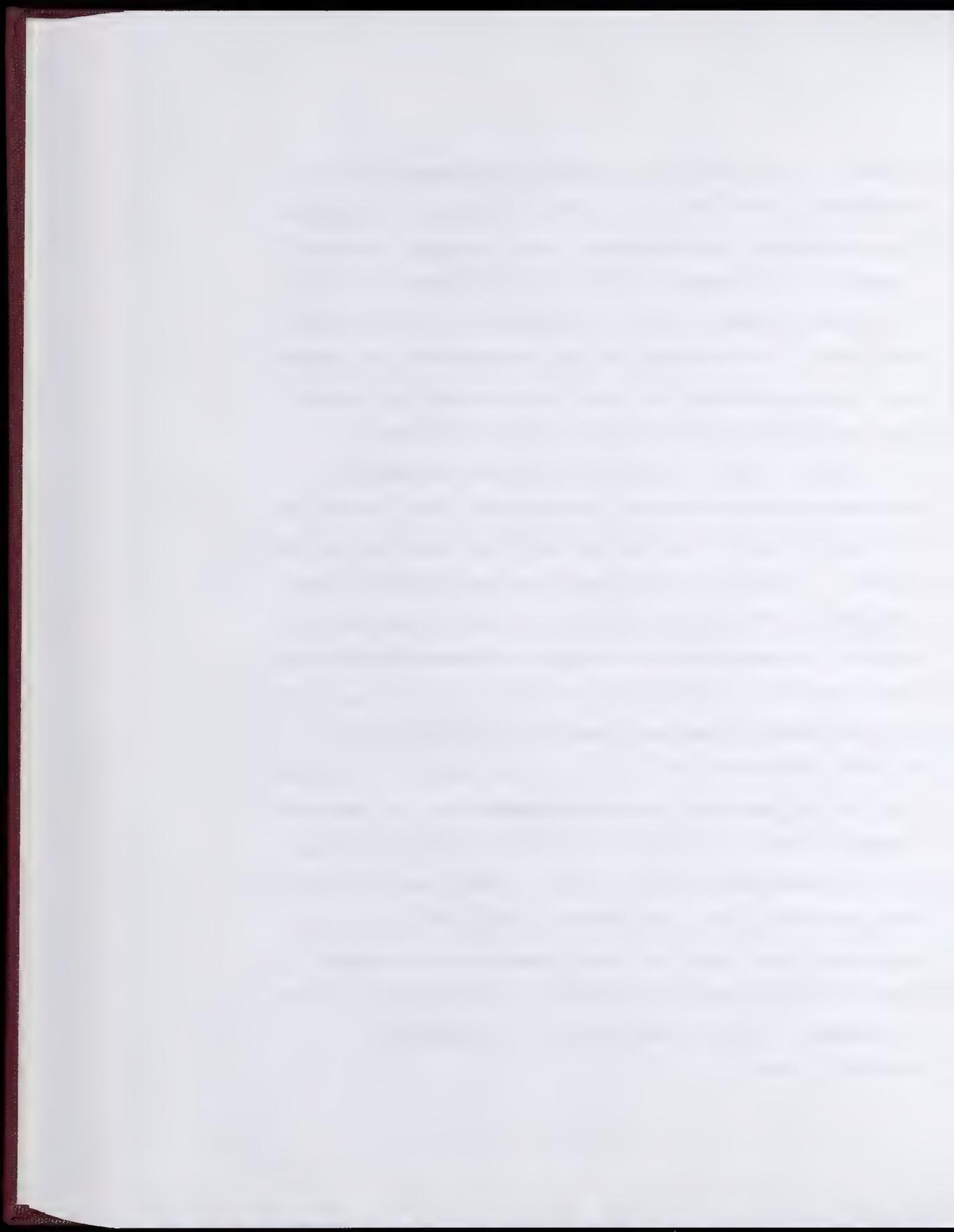
So in that triangle, it made the dealers--who actually spent all their lives, all their waking hours, trying to find works of art and sell them--closer to the museum world, because in the case of most museums that had a lot of money, they were major clients. Collectors tend to buy just what they like, and sometimes they may have a very narrow range of interests like paperweights or medals or plaquettes. But a museum has to be more general, has to satisfy different segments of the society and their different interests. Consequently, they were interested in everything. In order to do this and with staffs that were not all that big, they had to rely a great deal on dealers, because the dealers were working at it, as I said, on a twenty-four-hour-a-day, three-hundred-sixty-five-days-a-year basis, whereas the museum curator or the museum director could work at it only on a part-time basis. The simple reality of the acquisition of important



works of art is that, by and large, they appear either in the dealer's hands because of the contacts he's built up over, sometimes, generations or they appear at auction suddenly in an extremely commercial environment. If one is to get the best things for the museum, you have jolly well got to be well aware of the dealer world and you've got to be sympathetic and give them the kind of respect that they deserve for the contribution they make.

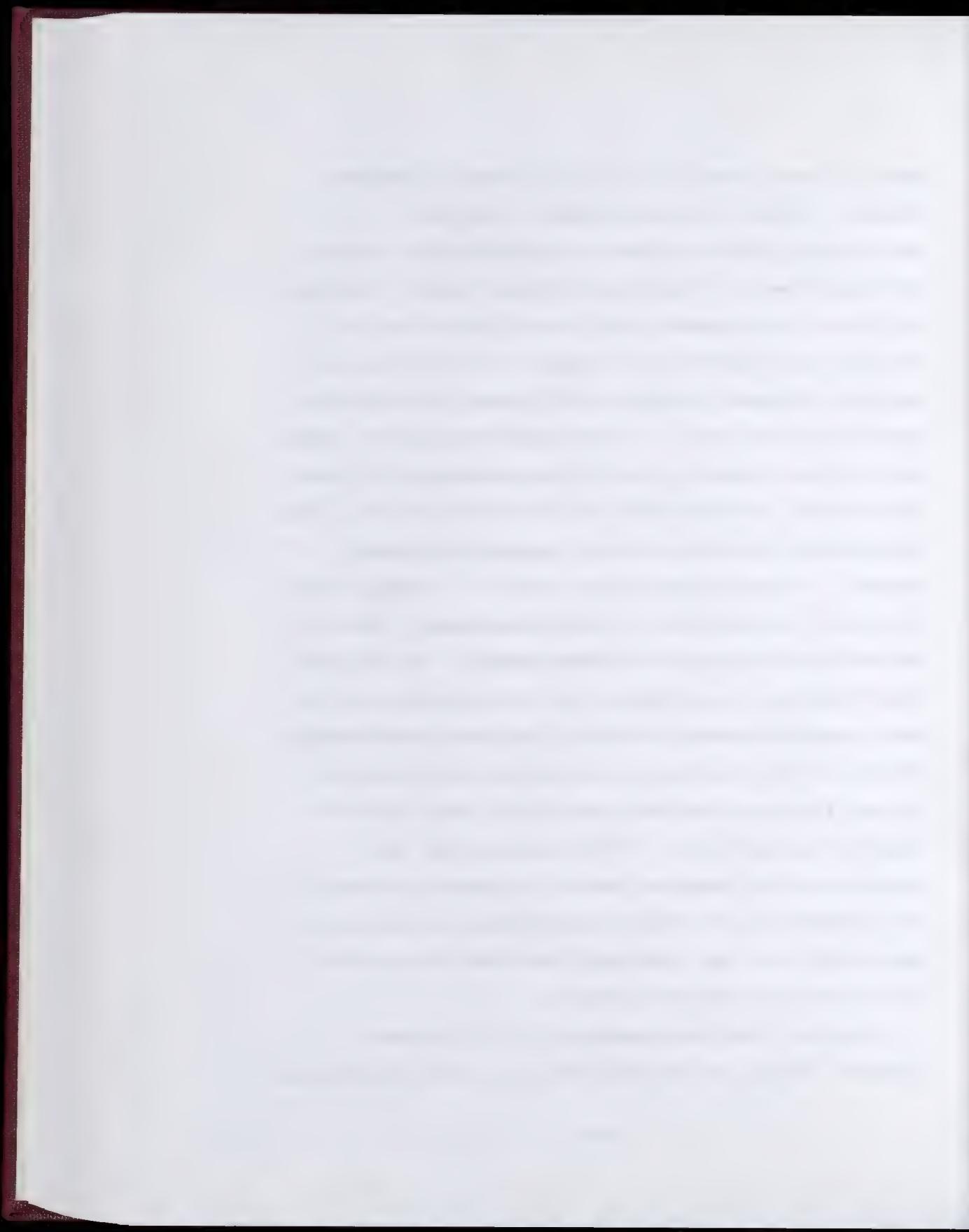
You still hear, especially from the new breed of deconstructive moralists in the academic world, about the skulduggery and the crookedness and etc., etc. of the art market. The art market is just like the banking or law industry in the sense that the same human beings are working in these different things, and human beings being what they are, in my opinion, you have some good ones and you have some halfway good ones and you have bad ones. You have wickedness and you have greed and all the things that we read about in the seven deadly sins, for example. I gave a lecture and wrote an article called "Collecting and the Seven Deadly Sins," which I liked, and it's kind of a whimsical, very nice article. Bill [William D.] Wixom was crazy about it. It's amazing how the seven deadly sins fit into all the drives and the faults in the art market: avarice, envy, lust-- It's marvelous.

GARDNER: Lust?



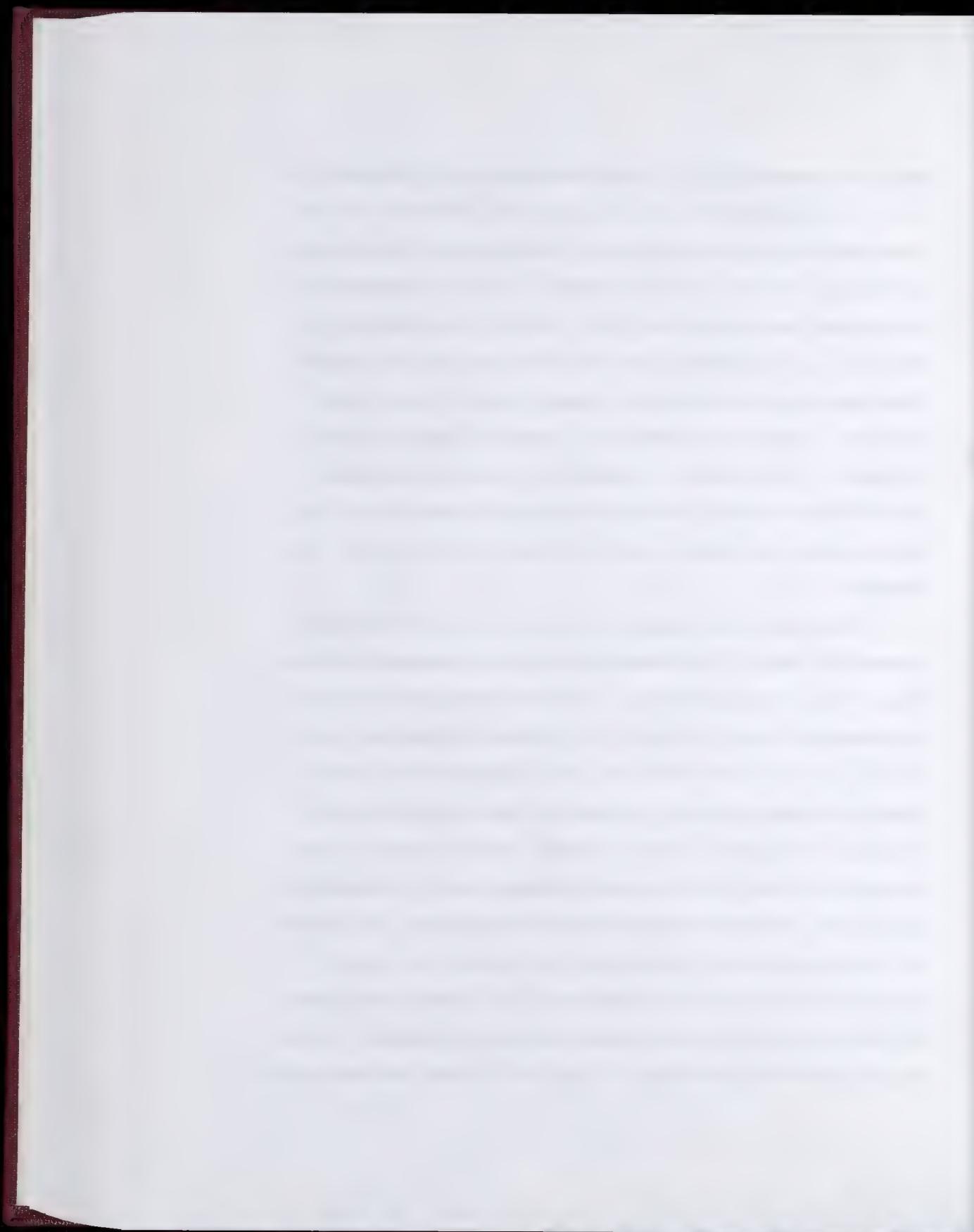
LEE: Oh, yes. The lust for art. I mean, it can be a disease. Anyhow, the dealers make a very real contribution, and of course some make more than others. But a good dealer-- There are different types. There are old firms, like Rosenberg and Stiebel in New York or [Thomas] Agnew [and Sons] in London or the old firm of Colnaghi in London, which is now, I guess, not terribly much tied to the past. Certain modern dealers like Sidney Janis or Curt Valentin, back in the midcentury they were connoisseurs, and also they knew the living artists. They went out on limbs and exercised judgment and risked capital. If you're putting your capital-- risking it--on an artist, you have made a kind of commitment. This is before the days of hype and advertisement. But if, like Paul Rosenberg, a great dealer in postimpressionists in early twentieth-century painting, they made commitments to artists at the time who were not getting all those big prices, they also knew they had to know their stuff if they were going to deal. It's disastrous for the reputation of an important dealer to present a forgery. It's catastrophic for him to accidentally misrepresent a work which is in bad condition, let's say, because he hasn't read the condition properly.

So, one, they know something; two, it's their lifework; three, many of them have very good character and



they are sympathetic and they know more about the work of art, in a nonscholarly way but in a way essential to the understanding of a work of art, than a lot of the famous professors or the famous curators. I gave an address at the annual meeting of the [Art] Dealers Association [of America]. I've always gone out of my way to try to give them the kind of credit and respect that I think they deserve. They're an absolutely essential part of that triangle. Each corner is essential, and the emphasis varies from time to time depending on circumstances, but the dealers have made a real contribution over many, many decades.

There are many important works of art in Cleveland [Museum of Art]. For example, there's a Romanesque ivory from a very famous retable, of which other panels are in the Metropolitan, in the [J. P.] Morgan Collection, and in Berlin and so forth--Ottonian, the rarest and the most beautiful imperial work in ivory of the early eleventh century. A dealer I knew in Paris, who we bought a few things from but-- We discussed things, and I listened to him a lot. We had a sympathetic relationship. He called me from Switzerland and said he had found, in a good private collection in Switzerland, this large ivory panel of Christ with the twelve apostles, and he thought it was right and it was Ottonian. I got Bill Wixom and he got on



the line with me and we quizzed him about it and so forth. And then we just went. We asked him to hold it and we just went, separately. I went to the Dolder Hotel and met the dealer in Zurich. He had the ivory and it was fantastic. Bill recognized it right away. It's the central panel for this retable. And it was fairly expensive for that time but not outrageous. But we would never have known about that if the dealer had not simply said, "Well, this is the thing that Cleveland should be interested in" and called us up. And that's happened a great, great many times.

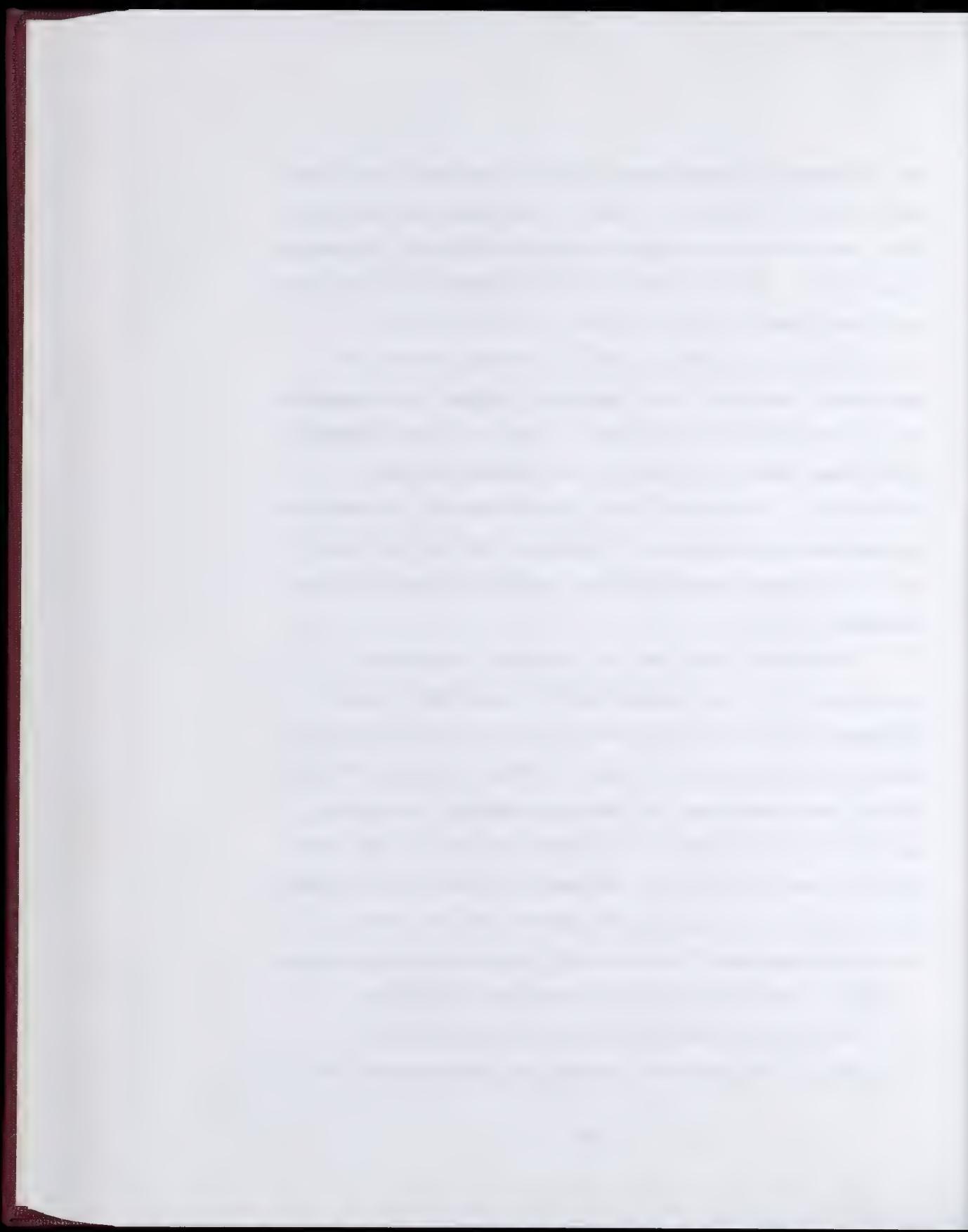
Ruth and I made a trip to-- The first time we'd done anything terribly much together. We went to Bavaria and to Austria. We met a dealer in Salzburg we had not met before, who's now gone, Kurt Rossacher, who had an art history doctorate from a German university. He was very nervous and excitable and he jumped from one thing to another. He operated in the medieval field and German baroque. He did Italian baroque, sketches. He made a gallery of sketches in the Schloss Mirabell, Salzburg. He didn't appeal to some people--one of our curators very much so--because he thought he tended to overclean and tamper with works of art, which he did to a certain extent. But he was so enthusiastic. And I, for the first time in my life, saw--this is back in I suppose about '59



or '60--some of these German baroque churches, and it was as if you'd hit me on the head. Something had been born that had never had a chance to get out before. It was a revelation: the extraordinary inventiveness and the verve and just sheer delight involved in that style in architecture, sculpture, and to a certain extent in painting. We bought very important things from Rossacher. In a sense, he got us started. Later we bought material from other dealers to develop our German baroque collection. But again, if it hadn't been for Rossacher's enthusiasm and his giving a push and telling us where to go to see these great churches, probably it may not have happened at all.

[Ching-tsil] Loo, who as a merchant began as a concierge in Paris, became the most important dealer in Chinese art in the world, and, as I've told you earlier, I used to go there after he died, to his successor [Frank Caro], and just study for days the hundreds of scroll paintings that he managed to accumulate during the late thirties and the forties. We ought to face the fact that we owe them a very great debt indeed and that their influence has been, on the whole, very beneficial and very crucial in the development of American collections.

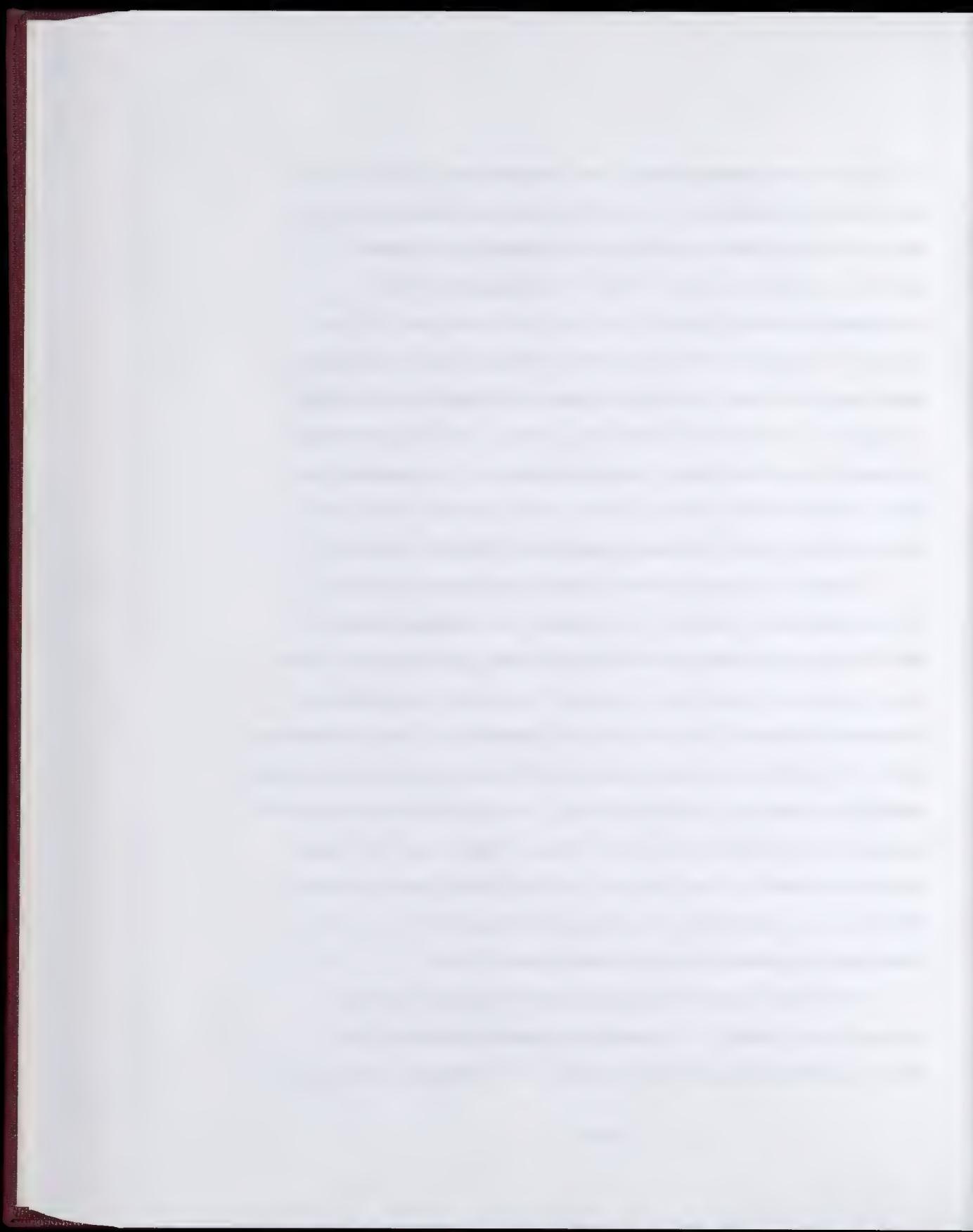
Now with the decline in quantity and quality available in the field of ancient art and medieval art,



art up to the contemporary, the balance has shifted. You now have contemporary art as the most available material, and it's also the most subject to advertising hype, special interests, etc., etc. Consequently, the responsibilities I think, as I've said earlier, of the museum in terms of education have become more important, more weighty, and this shifts the relationships in this triangle. I would say that now, today, the relationship between the educational institutions and the museums is more important and should have greater weight than the relationship that is there present in the art market.

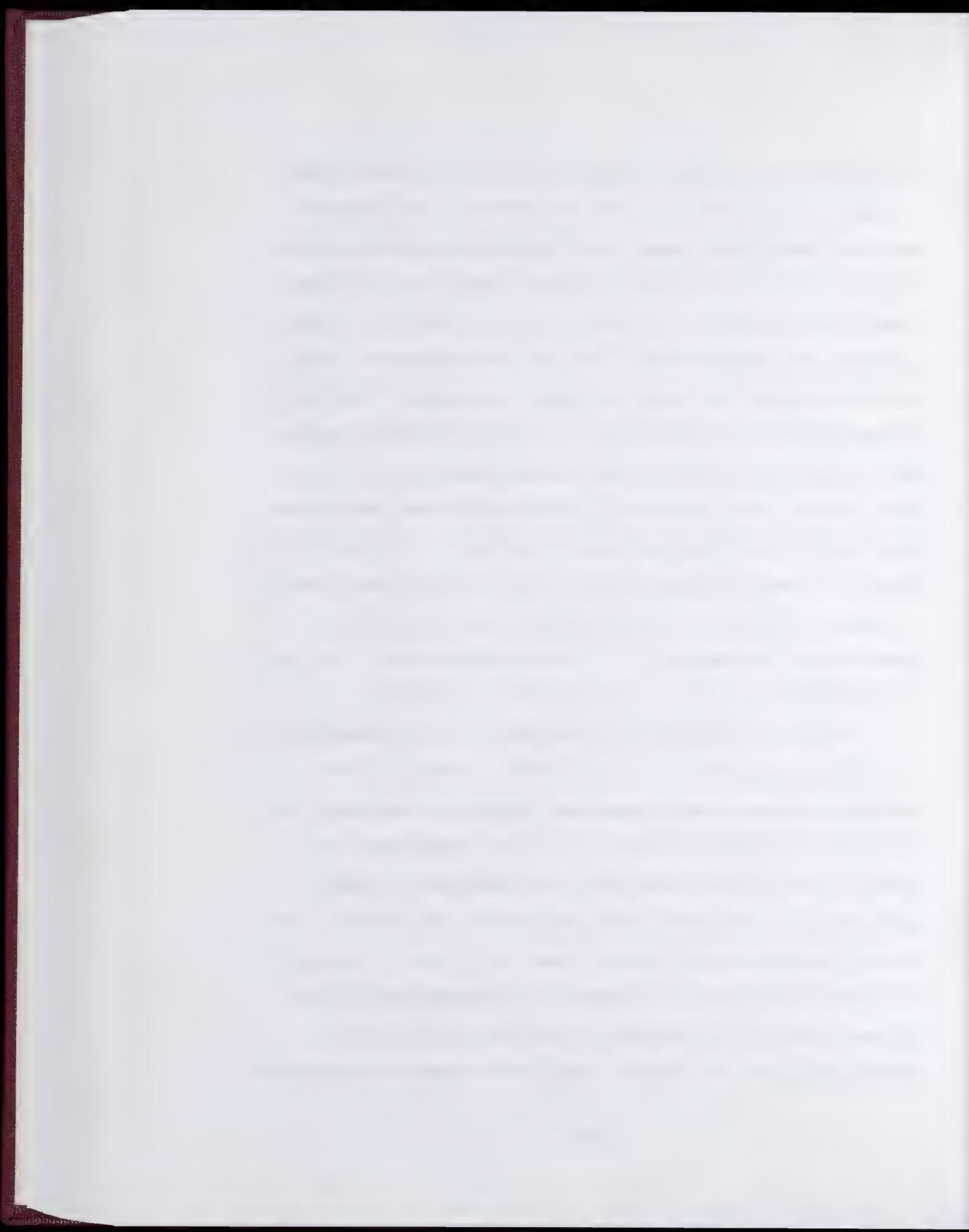
I must say that another great advantage with the dealer and why I really much prefer to discuss works of art with a good dealer than with a good professor is that they're object oriented. We don't get off into abstruse interpretations of the Trinity or something. We're dealing with the work of art qua work of art, and that involves its aesthetic quality, its condition, its relationship to other comparable works of art, etc. Also, they, most of them, are enthusiastic, and they've learned that lesson which I think is so important, which is that they're human and they make mistakes and they know about that.

Sometimes people complain about dealers marking things up so much. Or sometimes people complain that they're making any profit at all. If a dealer pays, let's



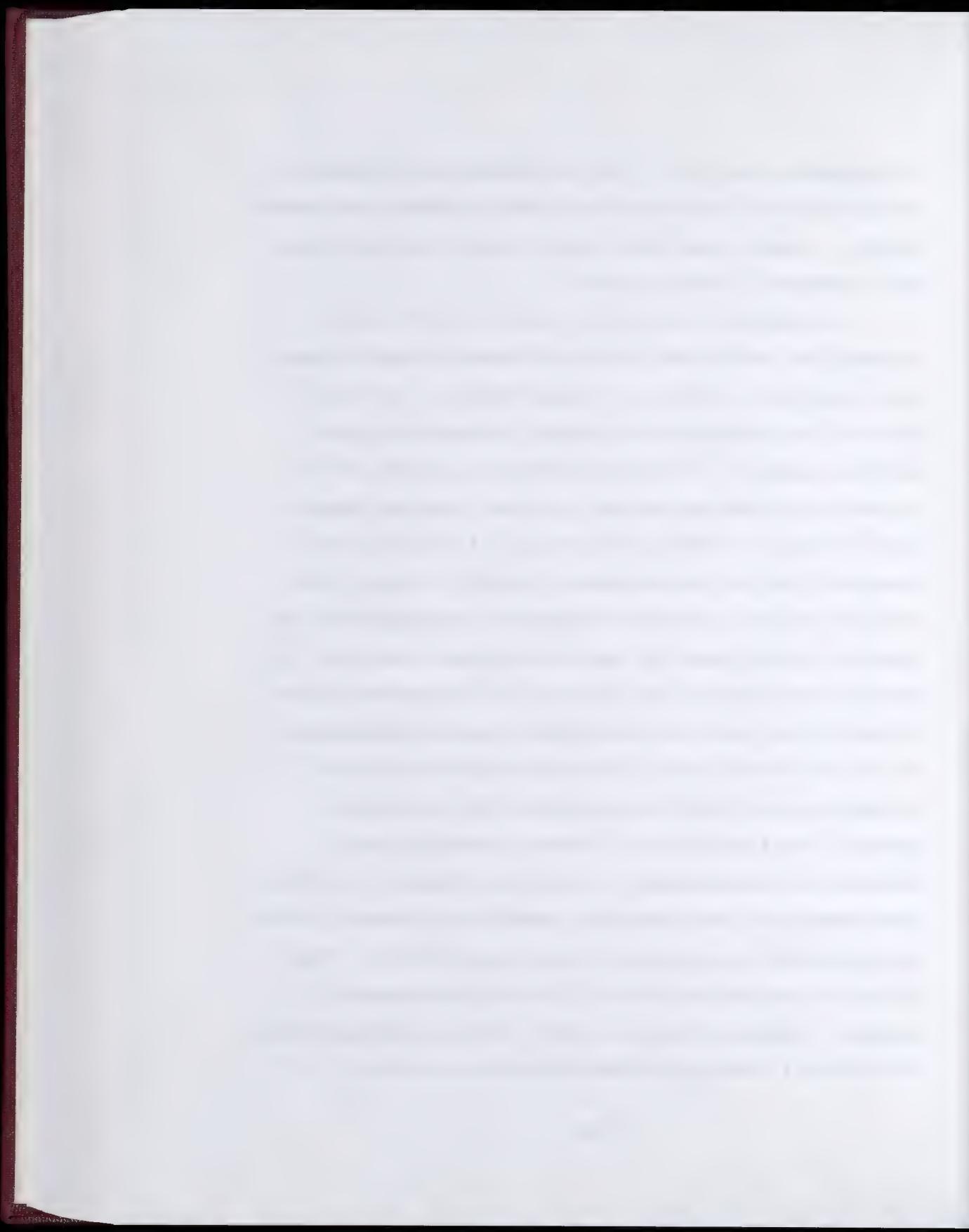
say, \$5,000 for an object--not at auction, privately--and he sells it for let's say \$15,000, that's a 300 percent markup. Well, that seems like a terrible sort of scalping of the client. But think of those things that he bought that he had to sell at a loss or he just had to put away because they didn't turn out to be what he thought they were or because the condition wasn't any good. They have to make decisions on the spot. That's one of the reasons dealers get great objects and museums sometimes don't get them at the first go-around. It's because the dealer can walk into a source and see something and he can say, "I'll take it." He can write a check out very often and give it to them. Whereas the museum comes in and says, "Oh, that's very interesting. I'd like to reserve it. Can you send me the object so I can study it?" And so on.

Then in many cases, many museums are very insensitive to the requirements of the art market. They will take objects and have them on approval for study sometimes for months, even in many cases over a year, sometimes even several years. And sometimes--not sometimes, a good percentage of the time--then they return it and say, "I'm sorry. We've decided we don't want it." Well, I mean, most of the dealers don't have ready tremendous sums of money. They're like anyone: they have to go to the banks, they have to borrow, they have to make arrangements



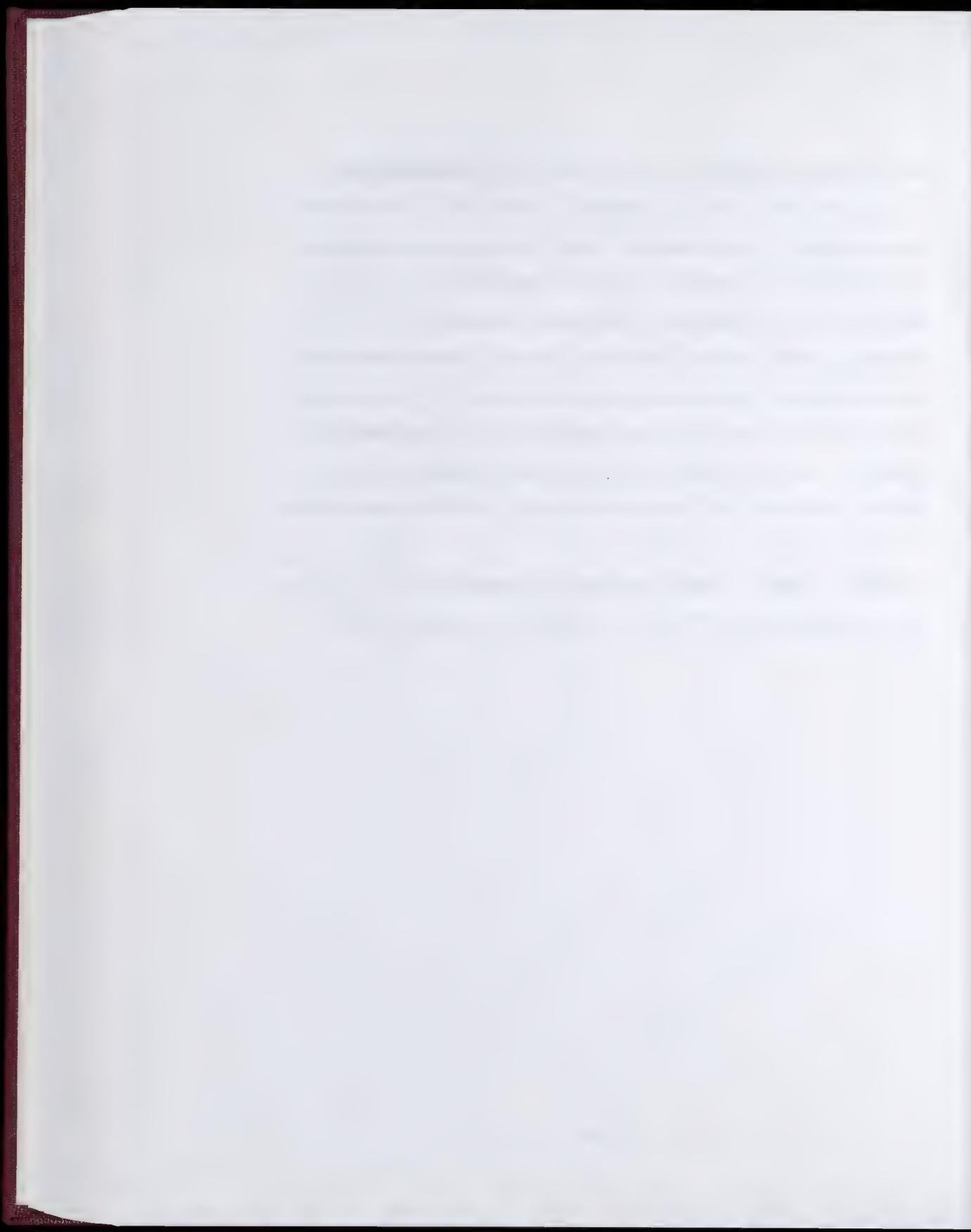
for payments, etc., etc. But the museums sort of take it for granted that the dealers are there to serve the museum world. In many cases, they tend to treat them as if they were servants. That's not fair.

I've learned an awful lot, both in the field of oriental art and in the field of European art and ancient art, from what I think are the good dealers. So if we think of the triangle as an eternal triangle but with shifting emphasis on the three different corners of the triangle, I think one can get, perhaps, a better idea of what it takes to develop collections. I'm talking now especially of the period between roughly, I'd say, 1900 and 1970 or 1980, when the development of collections was the sort of big thing for American museums. When you think of that period, you think of the collections in the United States, and I'm talking about general collections of the art of the world. When you think of the great collections you think of Kansas City [Art Institute], Detroit [Institute of Arts], Toledo [Museum of Art], Minneapolis [Metropolitan Cultural Arts Center], [the Fine Arts Museums of] San Francisco, Seattle [Art Museum], to a certain extent Los Angeles [County Museum of Art]. Then you go to the obvious places: [the Art Institute of] Chicago, Cleveland [Museum of Art], Buffalo [Albright-Knox Art Gallery], Washington [National Gallery of Art],



Philadelphia [Museum of Art], New York [Metropolitan Museum of Art], Boston [Museum of Fine Arts], Worcester [Art Museum]. Then down in Texas in more recent years, the Kimbell [Art Museum] and the Amon Carter Museum [of Western Art]. These all have been developed in the first three quarters of the twentieth century, these fantastic collections of quality and importance and of inestimable value for the education and delectation of the American people. But that age pretty much is grinding to a halt. Again, it means the triangle is going to shift and change a lot.

GARDNER: Okay. Thank you for that exposition. That was very interesting. Now we'll move on to organizations.

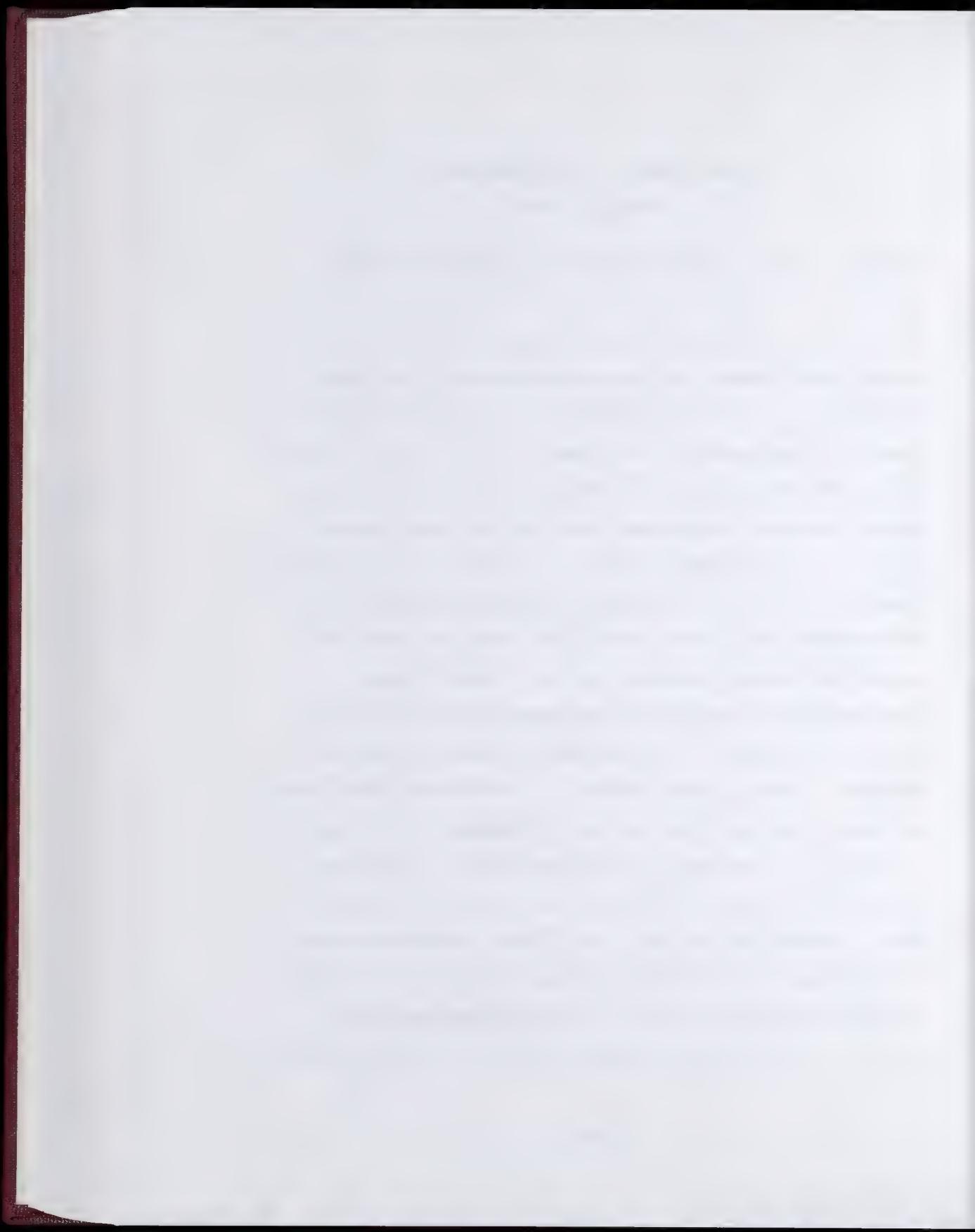


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JULY 16, 1992

GARDNER: You've mentioned that you wanted to add one thing.

LEE: I want to add one footnote which I think is a significant comment on these relationships we've been discussing. I'm always amused by the press releases that come out from museums. For example, I was in the elevator across the street from Rosenberg and Stiebel at a small dealer's place, Kleinberger, who had very good Spanish paintings. Harry Sperling was the owner of it. I'd been there and I got in the elevator and was going down. In the elevator was a very, very nice black gentleman who worked for Julius Weitzner, who was a kind of very interesting but very quirky and eccentric dealer in all kinds of paintings. This Weitzner's helper's name was Herbert. I said, "Good morning." And Herbert said, "Good morning. Have you been across to Rosenberg and Stiebel?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, they've got a very sexy painting over there." I said, "Oh, fine. I'll take a look. Thanks for the tip." So I went across the street to Rosenberg and Stiebel and, indeed, they had the big Jacques-Louis David that we bought of Amor and Psyche, which, as our painting curator at the time, Henry [Sayles]

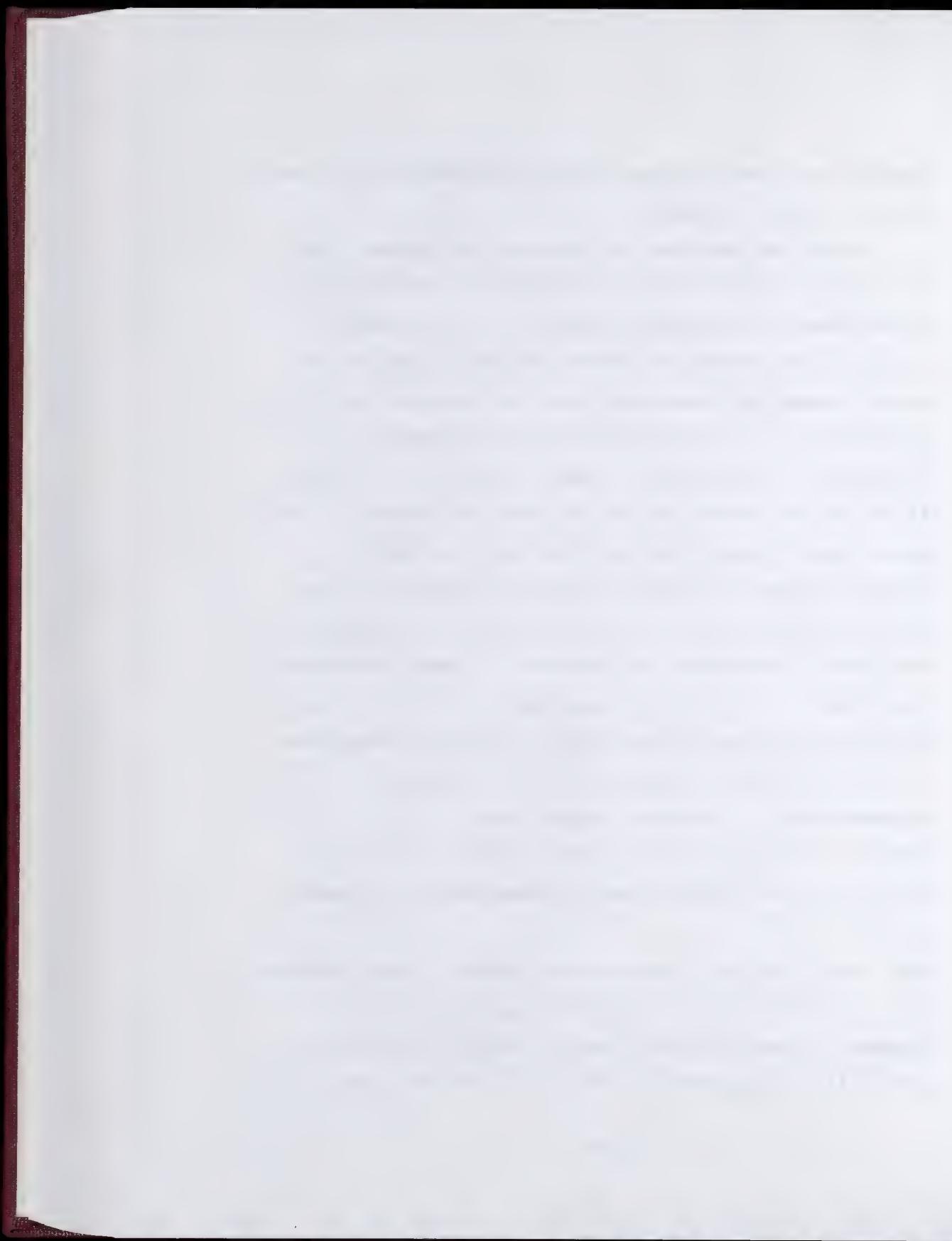


Francis, said, was the most expensive Valentine's Day card he'd ever seen. [laughter]

But at the same time at Rosenberg and Stiebel, they had a large Tiepolo which had already been reserved by the Boston museum, Time Revealing Truth, a very splendid, large ceiling decoration. Boston bought it, and in the press release was a quotation from the director that--I'll paraphrase it--the museum had made this wonderful discovery of this long-lost Tiepolo, etc., etc. I mean, if you go into one of the two or three best dealers in the world, whose clients include-- They buy from the Rothschilds and Pannwitzes and so forth and so on. They show you a painting and they give you all the information. You haven't discovered that painting. I mean, if anyone's discovered it, the dealer discovered it. And that kind of relationship is one of the things I think has always been a problem between the dealers and the so-called professionals. I just want to add that.

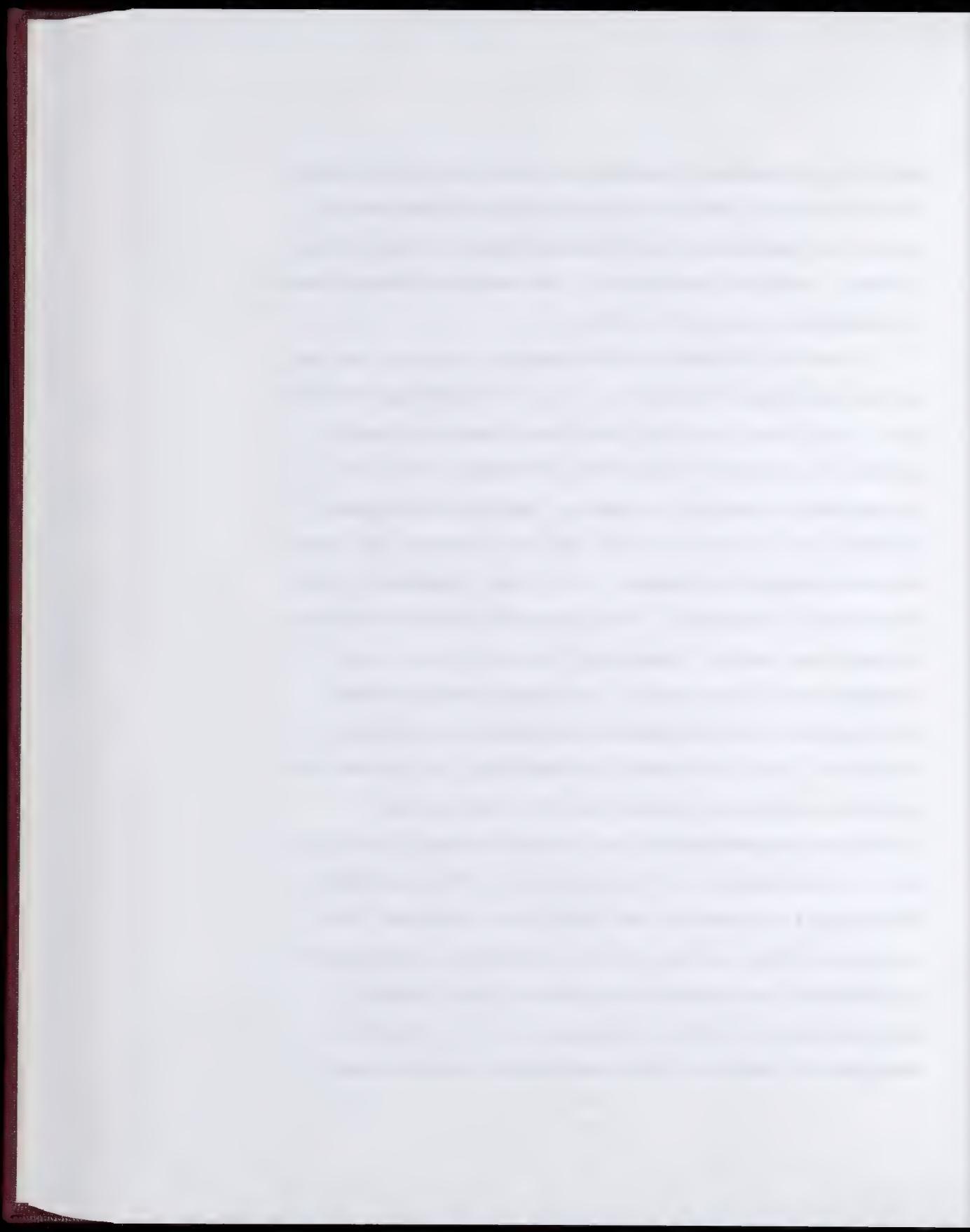
GARDNER: It's a good story. Okay. On to organization. Let's start off with the American Association of Museums [AAM].

LEE: Well, this will be relatively brief. I was a member and I was active. All these things go back now. I suppose I joined AAM when I was at Seattle [Art Museum], when I first came there in '46 or '47. It was a small



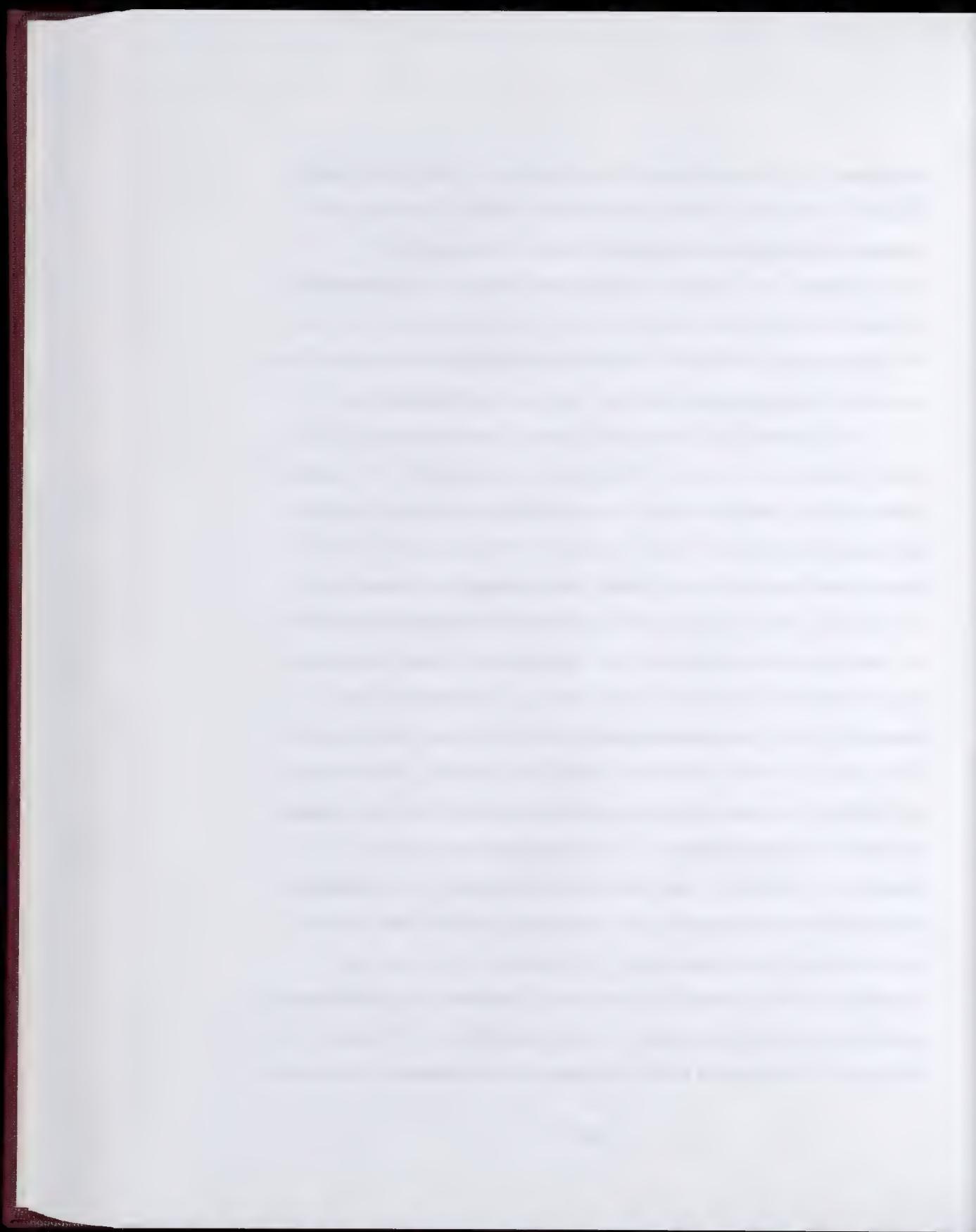
sort of professional organization that was to help assist the museums as a whole in relationship to governmental policy or regulations on different levels: city, state, federal, technical assistance. The sorts of things that a professional organization does.

I was on the board of trustees for a while, and we always had these discussions. One of the things that was very, very clear was that there was a serious tension within the American Association of Museums among the constituents' special interests. You had the science museums, the history museums, the art museums, the zoos, the anthropological museums, etc., etc. Gradually, you could see it happening. They began to have the rise of a concept they called "museology," which I think is a dreadful word. But anyhow, they began more and more talking about and considering methods of display, of education, under the rubric of museology, as if that was a unifying discipline rather than the intellectual discipline represented by the type of museum. This struck me as being absolutely "bassackwards." The important thing about a museum is not that it is a museum. The important thing is that it's an institution dedicated to a significant intellectual discipline: art, history, anthropology, science, technology, etc. I argued in meetings of the board of directors and in our annual



meetings, in the different study groups, that they really ought, I thought, to not centralize under a concept of museology but to decentralize under a concept of disciplines, but trying to use what they called museology to see how that was useful within the discipline and how it necessarily would be modified or changed because of the peculiar requirements of that particular discipline.

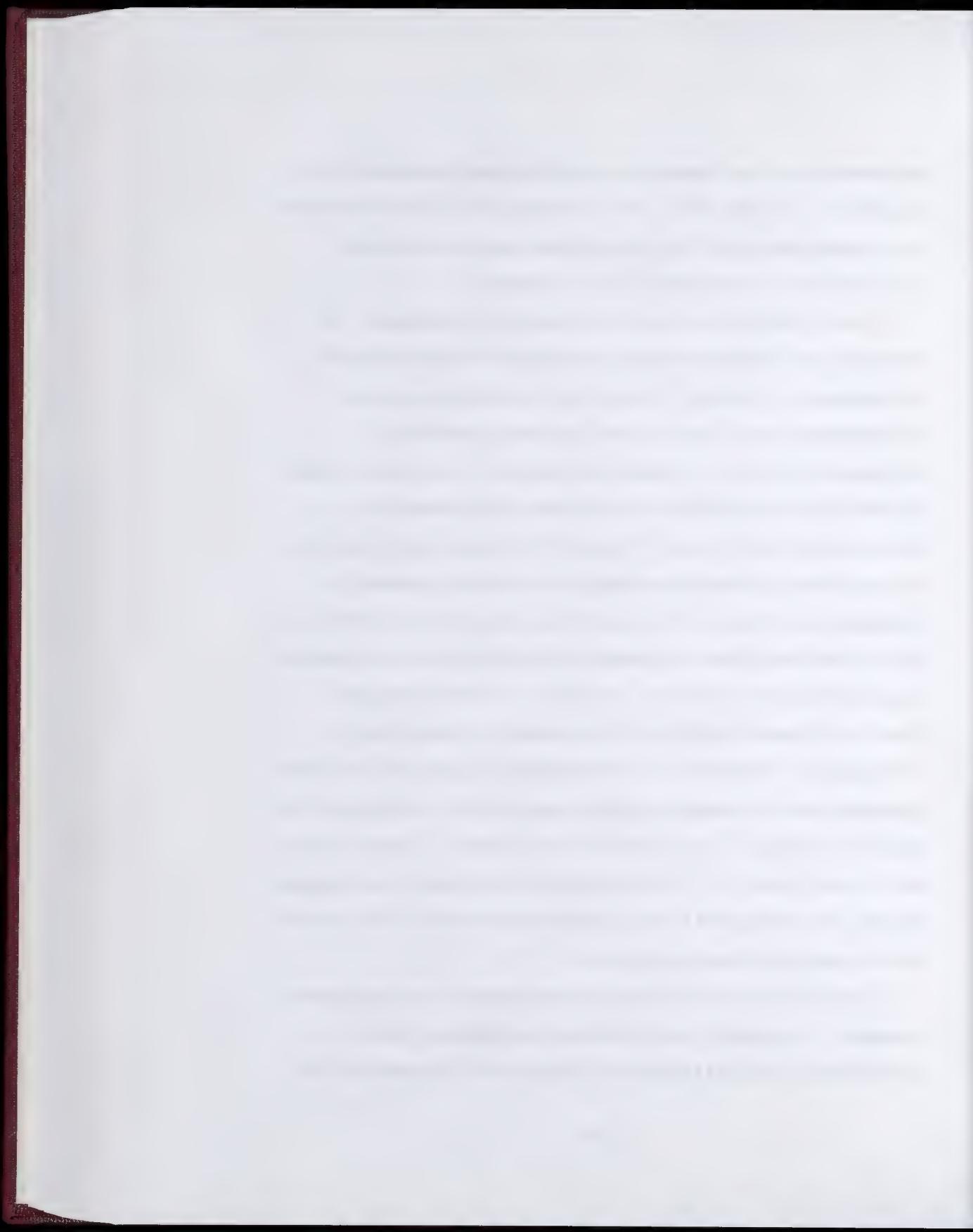
So I tended to emphasize, when I was arguing in this case, decentralization. The administration of the museum association, particularly, for perfectly obvious reasons, are empire builders, just like all other people. They emphasized centralizing under the concept of museology. Of course, they were aided and abetted by the exhibitors of the annual convention, the commercial firms that sold cases and this and that other thing. Obviously, for example, if a case maker could design a case that could be used by all these different kinds of museums, regardless of whether it was designed specifically for an art museum or for a science museum, it was economically more feasible. I didn't get anywhere with that, and gradually the museum association grew and grew in size and in the administrative bureaucracy. Of course, the rise of funding by the federal government from the arts endowments and so forth all was part of the same thing. Though, for instance, the humanities and the arts endowments [National



Endowment for the Humanities and National Endowment for the Arts], on the whole, do a pretty good job of balancing the requirements of the disciplines and the overall institutional containment of the museum.

Well, the AAM was going to meet in Cleveland. We received an invitation about the time of our fiftieth anniversary, I think. I was the chairman for local arrangements and I was on the program committee. I discussed this with a couple of people I have particularly discussed things with at the museum, Ed [Edward B.] Henning and Bill Wixom. I said, "You know, more and more we get these conventions where the keynote speaker is somebody who doesn't know anything much about anything in particular and gives a general thing saying how wonderful museums are and so forth. Why don't we do a program that's different and try to re-establish some kind of intellectual content and intellectual rigor and also have somebody who is someone in an intellectual field give the keynote address." So I got Nelson Goodman. Nelson said he'd love to do it. I explained to him what I was trying to do. He thought it was a good thing to do. He was all for it and said he would do it.

So we had the big meeting and Nelson was the keynote speaker. He gave a very interesting address about, in particular, the philosophical aspects of aesthetics in



relation to the teaching of art in an institutional context. I thought it was terrific. It was a total absolute lead balloon as far as the constituency went. I have never seen anything go over so badly. They simply weren't interested in any kind of serious philosophical, intellectual consideration of what it was they were doing. They were simply interested in dashing around from this exhibit to that exhibit or discussing the federal legislation or the funding. They were talking about all the mechanics, all the bureaucratic processes involved in what they called museology. They were not interested in the slightest in the disciplines that they represented.

Well, I lost interest after that in the museum association. I think I finally let my membership lapse a couple of years ago. To me, it's an organization of no interest.

GARDNER: What about the spin-off group that you participated in? The museum directors? Wasn't that part--?

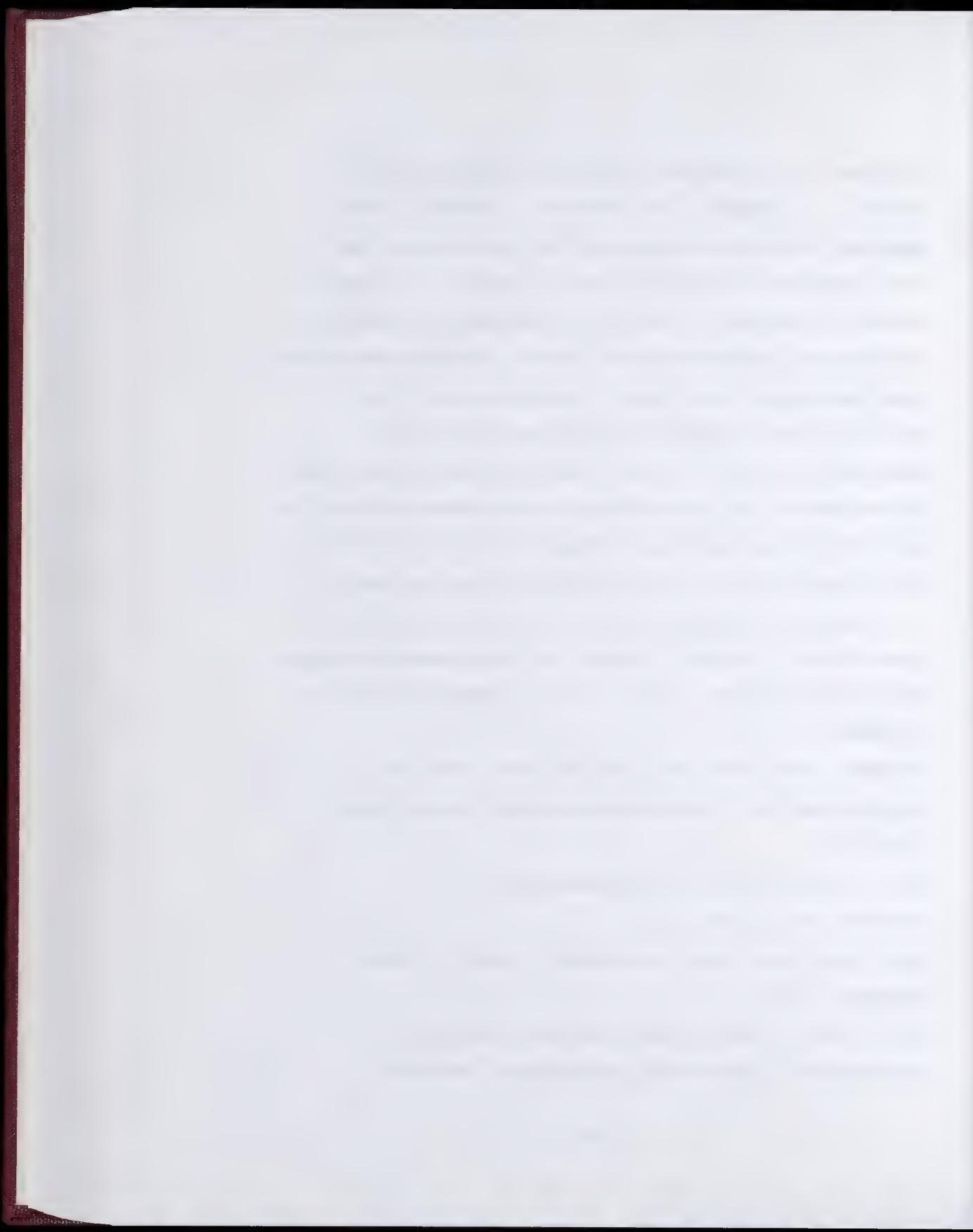
LEE: Oh, no. That's a different story.

GARDNER: Oh, is it?

LEE: Yes. And which I'm perfectly happy to begin.

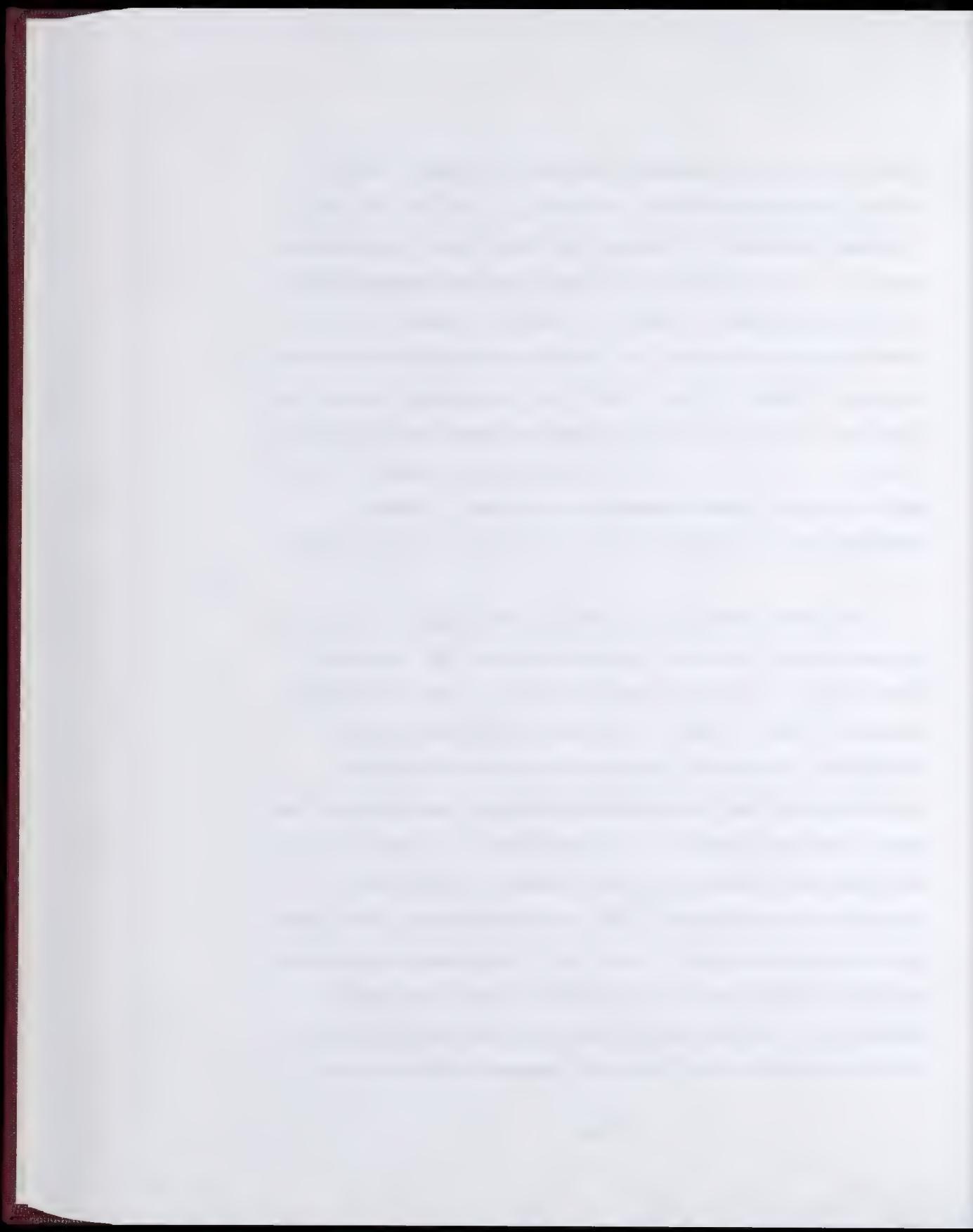
GARDNER: Okay.

LEE: Now, for art museums, the most important organization, supra-local organization, was the



Association of Art Museum Directors, the AAMD. When I became associate director at Seattle, I was not eligible. I became director in Cleveland in 1958, and I was elected, because I was the director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, the following year. There's a lapse of a year. I knew about the organization, and I'd seen it from a distance in operation before the war when I was a graduate student in Cleveland. William [M.] Milliken had been one of the big figures in the AAMD. So I finally became a member in 1959 and we invited them to meet in Cleveland. I don't remember when it was but it was the early sixties, before '66.

The AAMD indeed was a perfect reflection of the state of American art museums before World War II. It was a kind of club. It was an exclusive club. The first few meetings I went to were a continuation of the prewar situation. Each year, the host museum had wonderful luncheons and they had wonderful dinners, two dinners, and good wines and wonderful food and then the receptions with all the upper echelons of the museums, the trustees, committee organizations. And they had sessions that were sometimes interesting. There was a European organization, basically organized by the Germans, which discussed forgeries on the art market and an annual meeting where they talked about--to just keep themselves up-to-date--

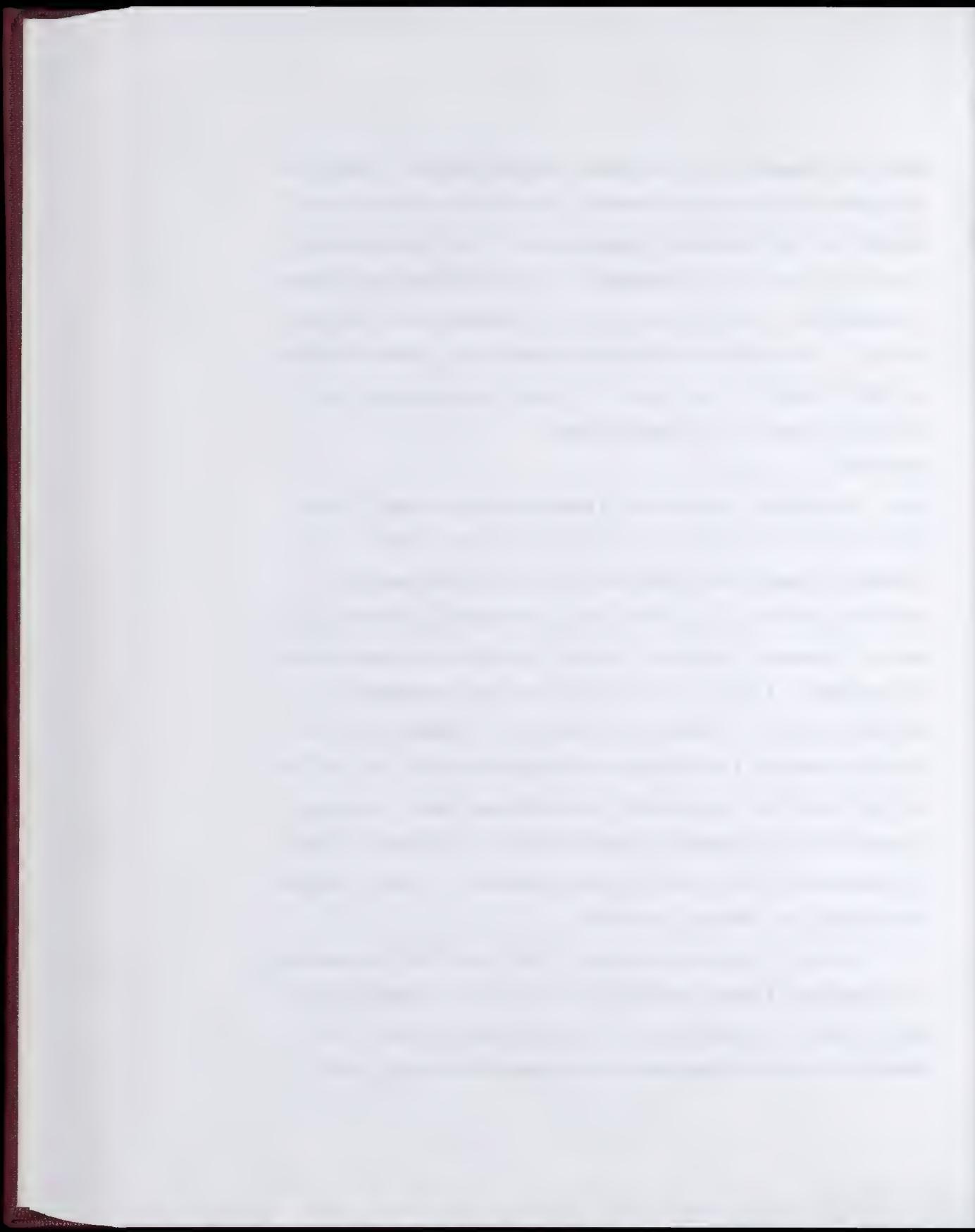


what was happening in the great forgery market. They had a report by one of the members. William Milliken was a member of that European organization. They would have a report on what they discussed. They discussed the latest legislation. But the AAMD was not incorporated, not for profit. It was not eligible for receiving funds from any of the federal or municipal or state organizations or receiving funds from foundations.

GARDNER: Or donors.

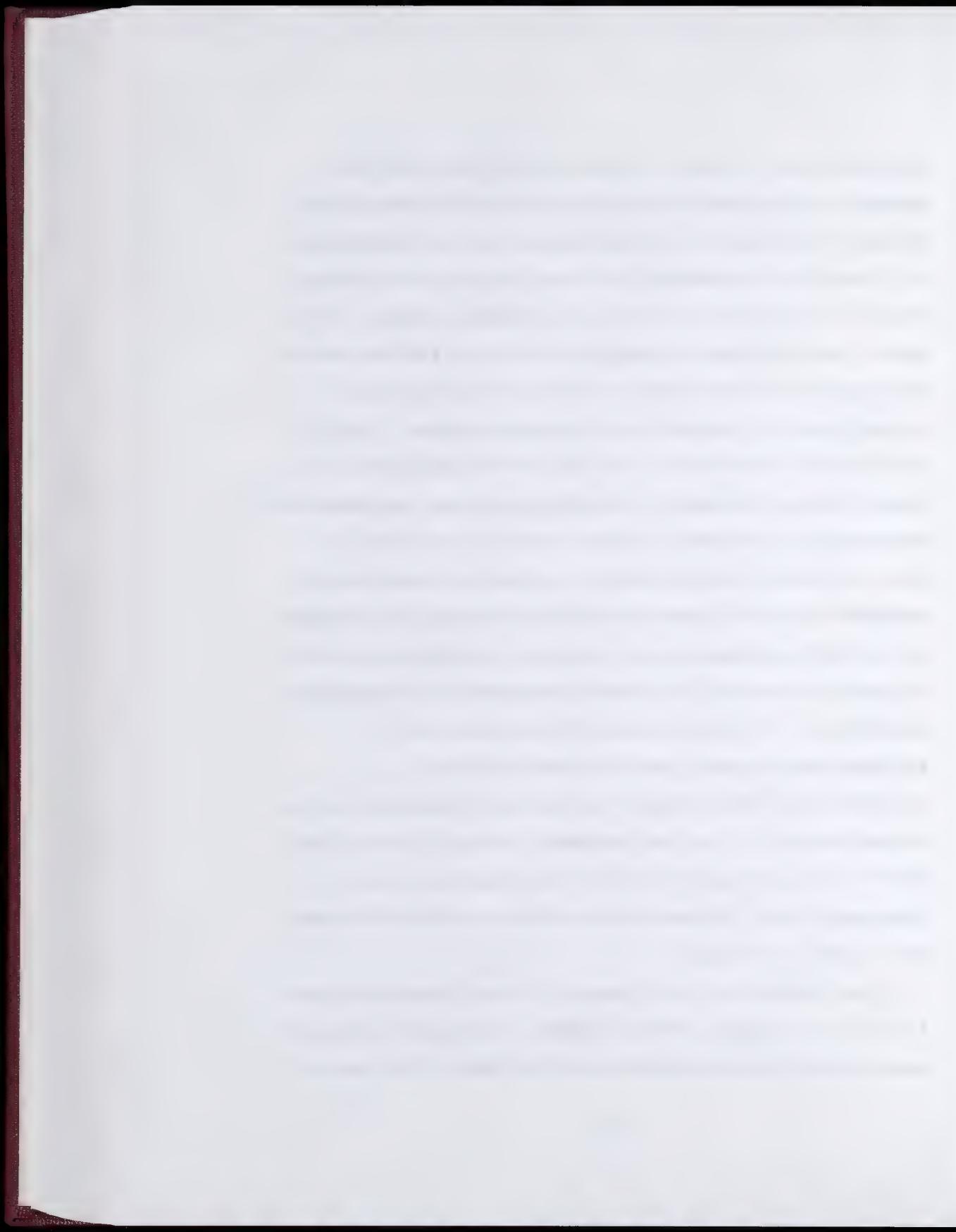
LEE: Or donors. Also they liked to be informal. They liked to be like a club. And, indeed, there were occasions when there were some directors who were not admitted to the club. They were selected as individuals. Well, I thought this was, frankly, a hell of a way to run a railroad. I had a few friends who were directors and we talked about it. Freddie [Frederick B.] Adams [Jr.] was the director of [the Pierpont] Morgan Library. He was one of the club but he saw what the problems were. I think Jim Rorimer was somewhat sympathetic. There were a few directors who were aware of the problems. I was a fairly new member but brash, as usual.

Anyhow, I began agitating. When they had the meeting in Cleveland I began agitating and got my friends also to, and we really staged a kind of palace revolution. We moved--and it was approved--that they would apply for



incorporation, I think, in the state of New York as a nonprofit organization to be eligible to receive gifts. We made the change for the qualifications for membership so it was the institution that was the qualifying thing. Whoever was director automatically became a member of the AAMD. We also began to expand it so as to include more of the types of museums that were not part of the mainstream, such as university and college museums. Some of the smaller institutions, we reduced the requirements for budget, size. In short, I would say we made the AAMD more democratic in whatever the best sense of that word is. Also, we made it more efficient so that we could have an endowment and get income so we could actually do something as the AAMD representing art museums, something the AAM couldn't do because they didn't recognize the disciplinary separation. So this was part of that same sort of thinking and argument involving what kind of representation there should be for the art museums in the United States. Since the AAM wasn't doing it right, why didn't we do it right? Some of the directors weren't happy with this, the party types and the old aristocrats, but we got it through.

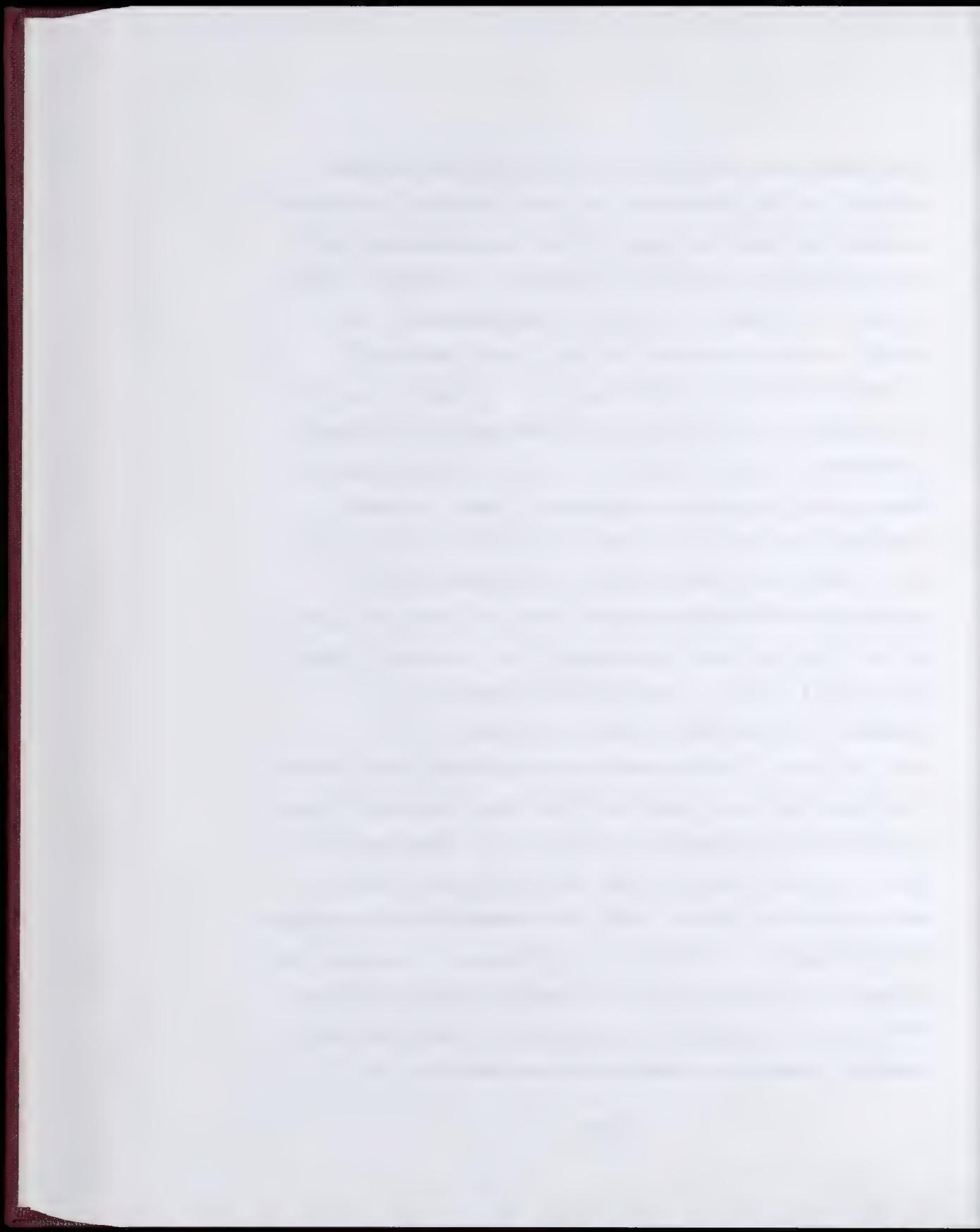
And to show you how I mean-- I'm not complaining and I say it as a purely factual matter, which can be checked against the list of presidents of the AAMD. The custom



had always been, and still is, that the vice president becomes the next president and every president serves only one year and then the next. I was vice president, and I was scheduled to be the next president, succeeding Freddie Adams. And Freddie, who I respected enormously, was helpful in this business. He was a very, very well connected and very, very bright man. Anyhow, it was the only time in the history of the AAMD that they elected a president to succeed himself--at that particular meeting where we had the palace revolution. Then I became president the next year. But it was quite obvious they didn't want the brash director of Cleveland to be president on the first occasion where all this new power and all this new stuff was going to be in place. I don't mind, but I thought it was kind of interesting.

GARDNER: And the organization continues?

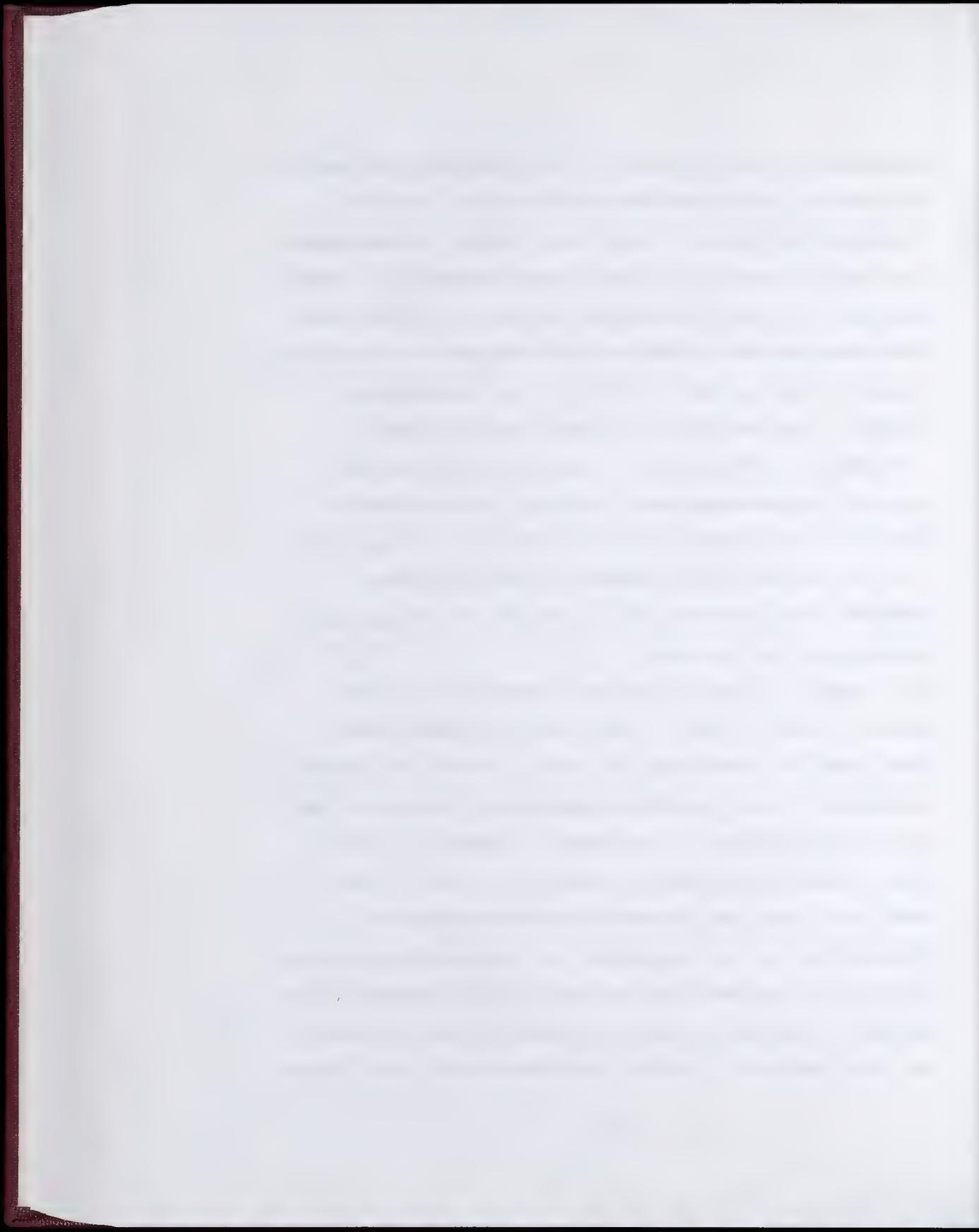
LEE: Oh, yes. It met here in Raleigh/Chapel Hill [North Carolina] this last June and it all went very well. And they have very substantive sessions now. They have very good committee reports. They take up things; they go after their own people. They've produced a code of ethics and professional practices for art museums. Recently, for example, the administration of Brandeis [University] went after and did succeed in selling works of art from the Brandeis [Rose] Art Museum and using the money for



operations for the university. The AAMD made what amounts to a boycott of the Brandeis art museum at Brandeis University and [wrote] a very stiff letter, a representation to the president of the Brandeis University. They've operated in a very professional way now for a long time. They have been very effective with Congress for furnishing people to testify and to work with the endowments on things. They defended, of course, the Cincinnati [Contemporary Arts Center] in the brouhaha about the [Robert] Mapplethorpe show. I think that they're an effective organization and one of the reasons why I think the AAM, as far as art museums, is rather useless.

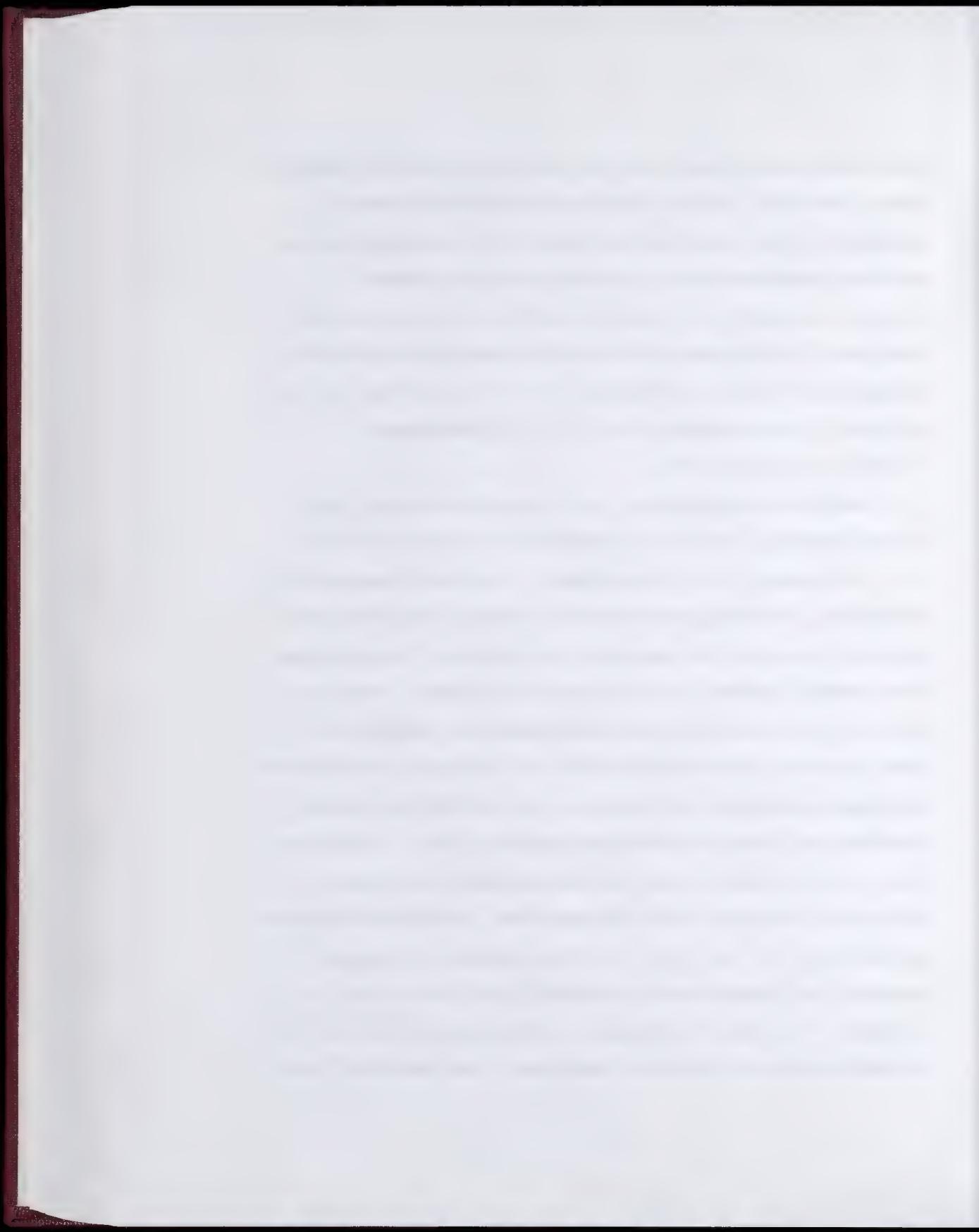
GARDNER: The next thing on my list is the College Art Association [of America].

LEE: Well, you know, I've been a member of that ever since I think 19-- Well, when I was a graduate student-- 1939, 1940, or something like that. I have just recently indicated I'm not renewing my membership, which I'll get to in just a minute. I was always a member. I was on their board of directors for some years. And I really made it my goal, my purpose within the College Art Association, to try to improve the relationships between the world of academia and the world of art museums, which, as we've indicated in previous comments, was not always all that cordial. I think I had some effect, and I found



some like-minded people and we did all we could to improve that. And also, trying to suggest that the academic members in that could be more helpful in volunteering for advisory positions and in working with art museums. I think it was part of a general shift in the triangle we discussed from acquisition-oriented institution to more education-oriented institution. So I think it was in the air and it was something that could be encouraged. I tried to encourage that.

Back in the old times, let's say the fifties, the annual meetings were large compared to before World War II. The number of art historians, it's like a population explosion. You've got thousands of them. But even more, you get thousands and thousands of artists. The meetings were always divided into two sorts of groups. There were the art historians and then there were the artists who were teaching the practice of art in colleges, universities, and degree-granting art schools. So you had the artist sessions and the art historian sessions. And I would say that in a four-day annual conference there would be a maximum of three to four, perhaps five, different sessions going on at any one time. Morning session, afternoon session when papers were presented by art historians or artists. But the artists were in the art sessions and art historians in art historian sessions. And they had, say,

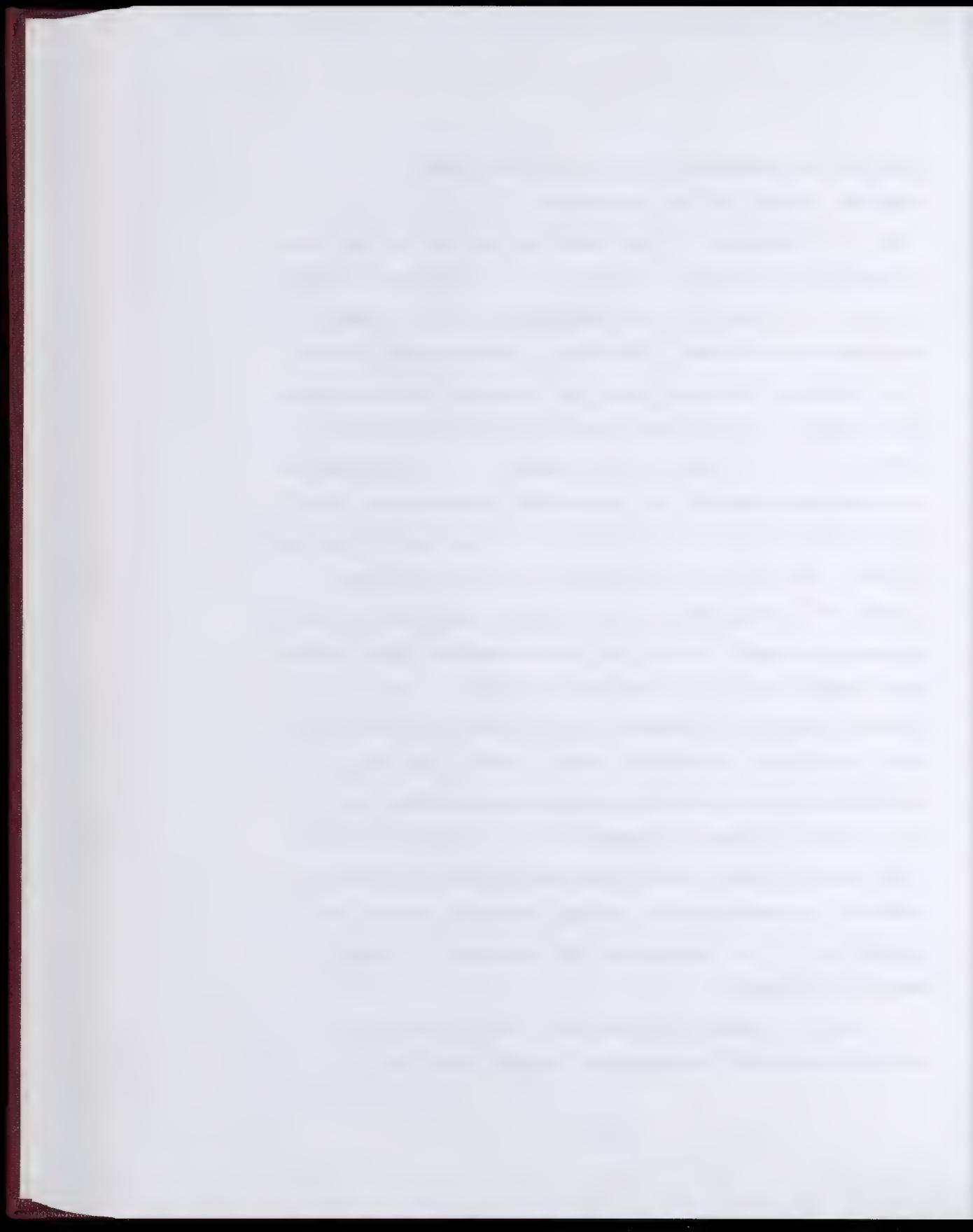


four to five sessions going at any one time.

GARDNER: So if you're interested--

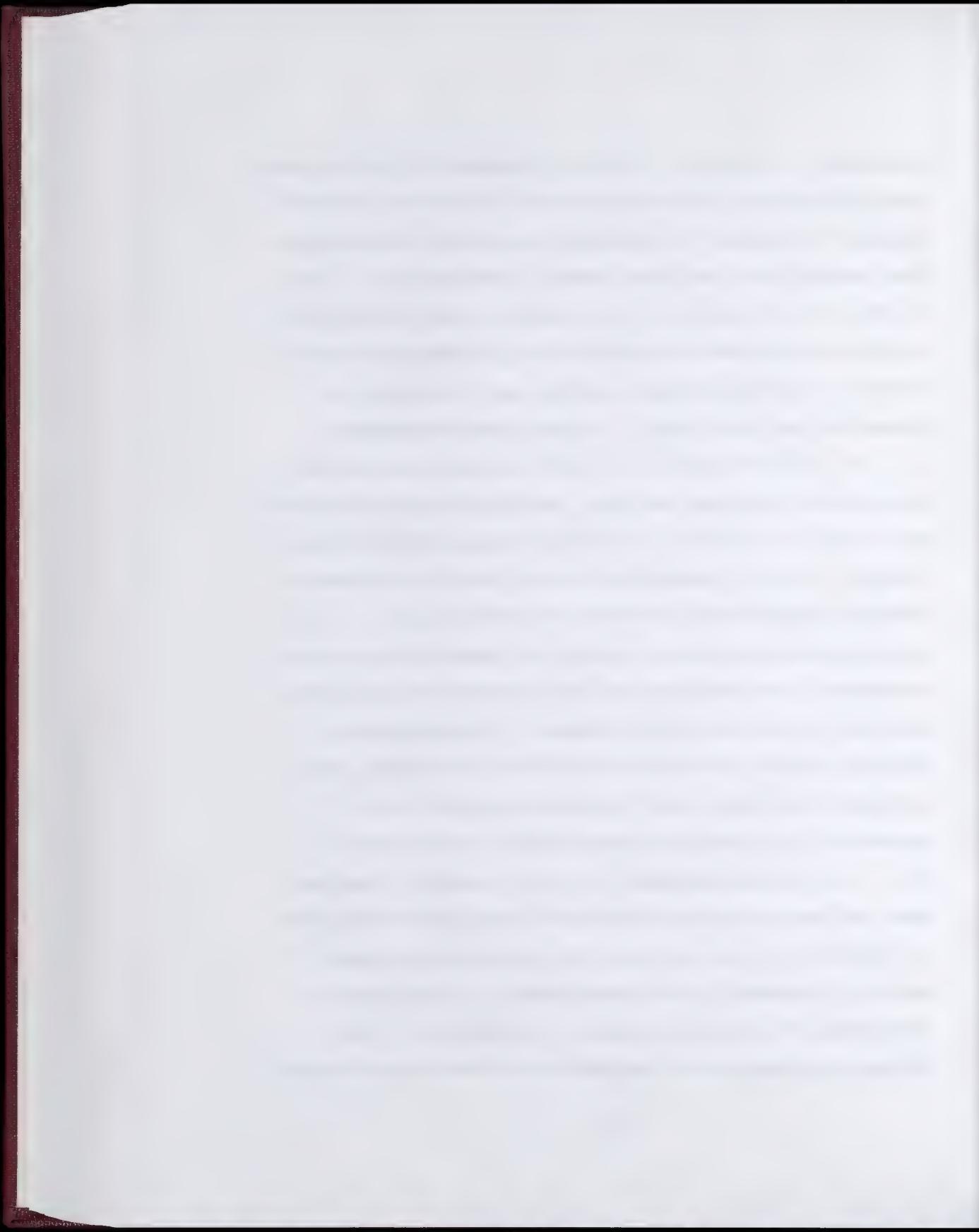
LEE: I'm interested in all kinds of art, but if you're an oriental art historian, there would be maybe one oriental art historical session with maybe four or five papers, but only one at that time. Even then, sometimes they didn't have oriental sessions. But you'd have to choose whether you wanted-- For instance, there would be one session on ancient art and a session on medieval art, then maybe one on nineteenth-century art with papers being given. You couldn't go to all of them at once, so you had to pick and choose. But with four or five. In the last fifteen years, it's burgeoned to a point where they have literally as many as twenty, thirty, or forty sessions going, with each specialized group with its own session. Very few general sessions. Gradually, in the last ten years, with the increase in interest in gender studies and minority studies and multiculturalism and so forth and so on, you've had a further fragmentation and division, and you also have had some pretty extraordinary performances in terms of presentations by special interest groups. It has become such a vast operation that is really, I think, heavily fragmented.

The most depressing part about the College Art Association annual meetings was always, from the



beginning, the sight of literally thousands of artists who took a membership in the College Art Association primarily because they wanted the placement service in that context. They needed jobs, and there weren't that many jobs. And to see these thousands of souls going around lugging their portfolio from room to room and being interviewed and so forth with little prospect, really was, I thought, a downer of the first order. It really was depressing.

But the combination now, with the proliferation of the artists' problems and jobs, and now the art historians are having a hard time-- The whole fragmentation of the thing in terms of specialization and also the new special interest groups really has made it increasingly unattractive and not very useful, at least as far as I'm concerned. And some time ago they divided the publication program into two major publications. The College Art Bulletin, which is the super-scholarly publication, has got some very, very fine, very detailed, and full-apparatus, full scholarly construction articles but on very, very narrow subjects. It still goes on. Then you have the new publication--at least it was new twenty-five to thirty years ago--which is the College Art Journal, which is supposed to be a more general and more popular collection of essays and things. Incidentally, the College Art Journal was the publication which reprinted my



address "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of--What?" many years ago. But now they basically are organizing it according to theme issues. So we have a constant succession of issues of the College Art Journal dedicated to issues within the fashionable ones of the moment: gender, race, multiculturalism, etc. And, you know, it goes on and on with repetition and with many articles that are plainly not objective but in my opinion totally unobjective. Some, a few, very good ones, but basically the whole thing is gone. And I sit down here in Chapel Hill--I'm retired but I'm still busy; I'm writing and I'm teaching--and this thing comes and I look at it. I dip around in it. And it just-- It's not useful to me at all. So I finally, since I don't want to spend my money on everything, what there is of it, decided, "No, no more. This year it's out." So the museum association and the College Art Association are, in my opinion, not useful to me anymore.

GARDNER: Next on my list is the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

LEE: Well, that's an honor. Actually, I'm flattered that I was selected to be a member. And I pay my dues. I read with considerable interest the quarterly publication, Daedalus, which, as you know, has dedicated each issue to a variety of subjects, whether it's nuclear disarmament or



the arts or literature or science. I find those essays, by some of the most distinguished people in the particular field very often, very interesting and useful and helpful. As far as my own activities go, I try to keep informed so I can vote intelligently on the annual recommendations for membership. But in terms of any sort of really useful involvement in their program and their particular requirements, I don't do anything.

GARDNER: At what point were you elected? Do you remember when?

LEE: Quite a long time ago.

GARDNER: Do you know who nominated you? Or is that a secret process?

LEE: It's a secret process. I don't know who did. I know who nominated me for the Century Association, but the American Academy I don't know. No. I must have become a member in about the early or mid-sixties. Some time ago.

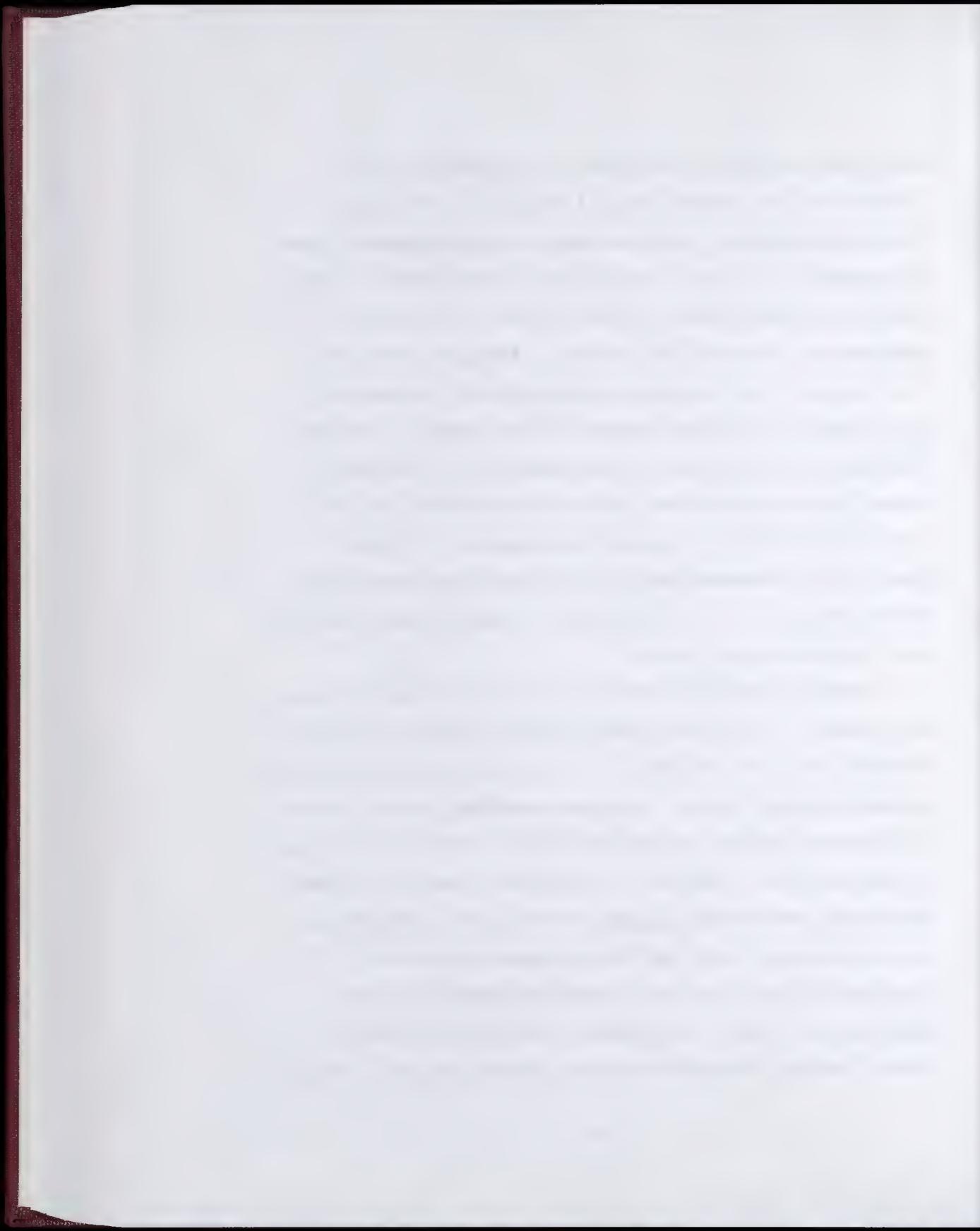
GARDNER: Well, tell me about the Century Association.

LEE: Well, it's kind of a wonderful place. Jim Rorimer was, I think, the one who nominated me. I'm a non-resident member. William Milliken was a member of the Century Association, too. They go way back. And one of my good friends, my fishing companion who was a professor of art history at Yale University, Sumner McKnight Crosby, was also a member of the Century Association. As you



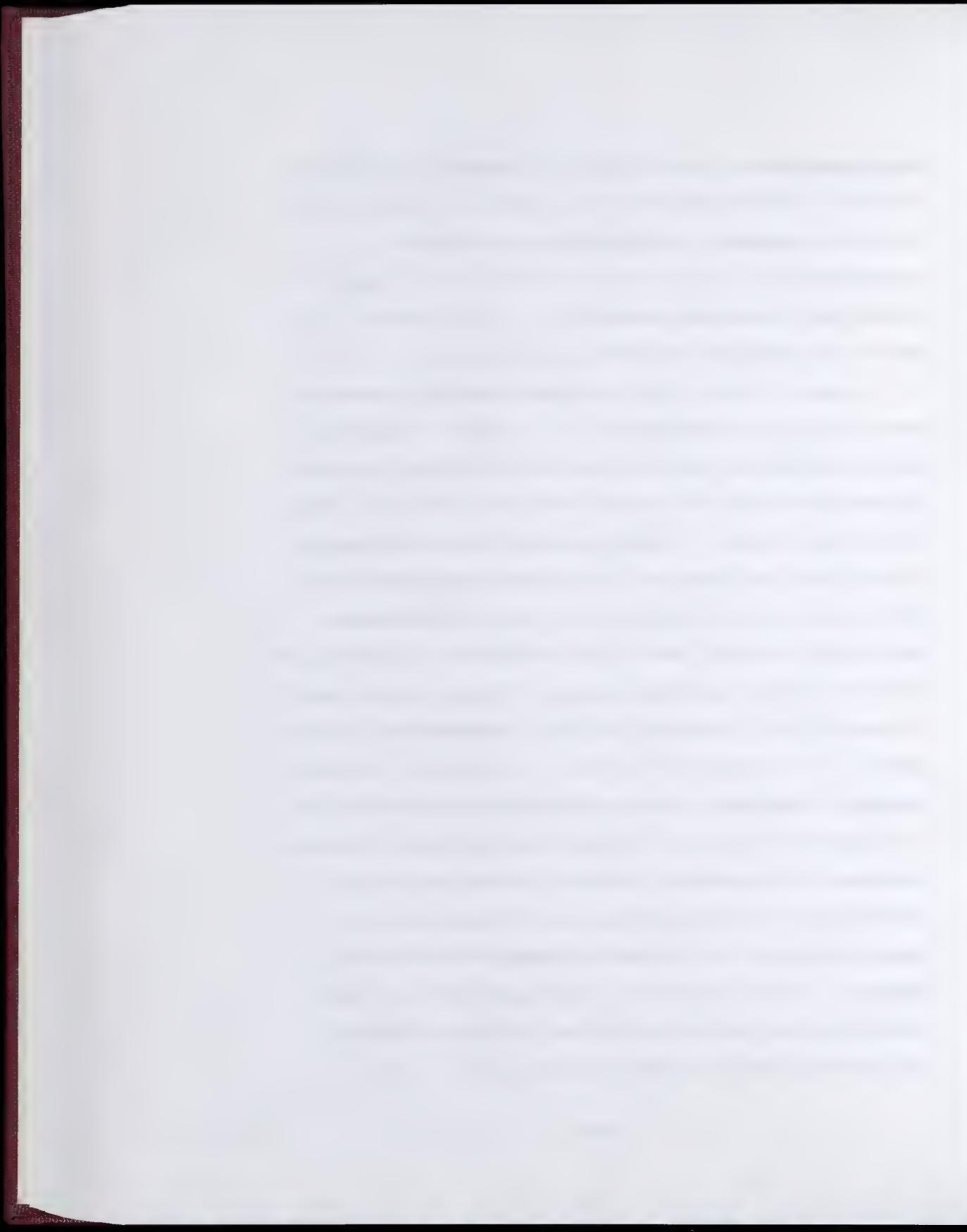
know, the building in New York is a landmark. The interior is the nearest thing I know of in the United States to something like the Garrick Club in London. Now of course it has, as it should have, women members. But when I first went there, it was all men. They have programs in the arts, as you know. Everyone knows what they can do. But they have this wonderful collection of paintings by the former members of the Century. It was founded by artists, and it was primarily, in its early years, solely an arts and letters association. In the twentieth century it's become increasingly-- It gets heavily into academia and it's into media members and so forth and so on. So it's broadened a great deal, but it's still a very lively place.

They have the long table which is the communal table for dinner. If you don't have a guest or aren't a part of a party, you just sit there, and whoever is next to you is whoever is next to you. And the tradition is that you're not supposed to say who you are and so forth, which I find rather peculiar. Anyhow, I've sat next once to Ved Mehta, who writes for the New Yorker and is a very interesting blind native of India and very literate and a very interesting mind. We had a long discussion because--- What was it? Yes, I was complaining to him a little later, halfway through our dinner, about changes in the



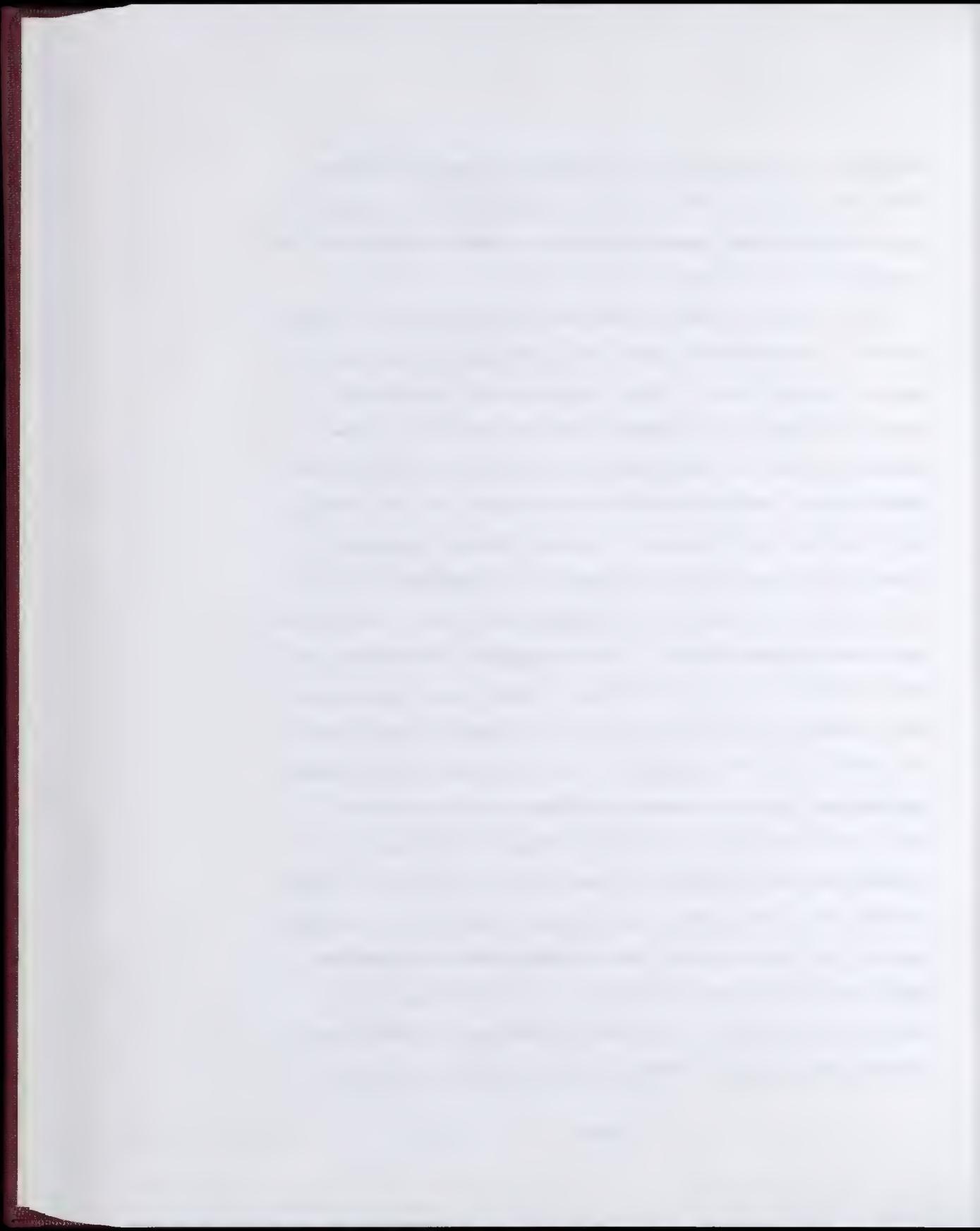
New Yorker which I thought were not necessarily all for the best. He defended them very, very well, and I think I ended the discussion with perhaps a much better understanding of what it was all about. But it was a lively and interesting conversation. Other times, I've sat at the table and ran into people I know.

I haven't used it all that much because it does not provide living accommodations, so it doesn't help when you're making your trips to New York and trying to avoid the enormous costs for a hotel room up in the area where you've got to work. I used to use it more often because I'd go there for lunch or in the evening for dinner when I was in New York for three or four days for the museum. But since I retired, when I get to New York, I usually get there for a very specific purpose. It's no secret, and I'm sorry, but I find New York very unattractive in recent years. I was raised in New York. I loved it. We had a wonderful time when I was in the early museum world, but it's gotten increasingly so expensive and such, I think, a dishonest and depressing contrast between wealth and poverty and the increased expense of things and the deterioration of the theater in terms of the kind of theater I like-- We've been-- Ruth goes with me-- Well, I think this year we've been to New York twice together. But normally when I go for a meeting I fly. It's



wonderful. Raleigh-Durham [airport] is twenty minutes from our house. I can go in the morning, get a plane, go up to New York and spend a whole day there and get back in time for a late supper, and that's it.

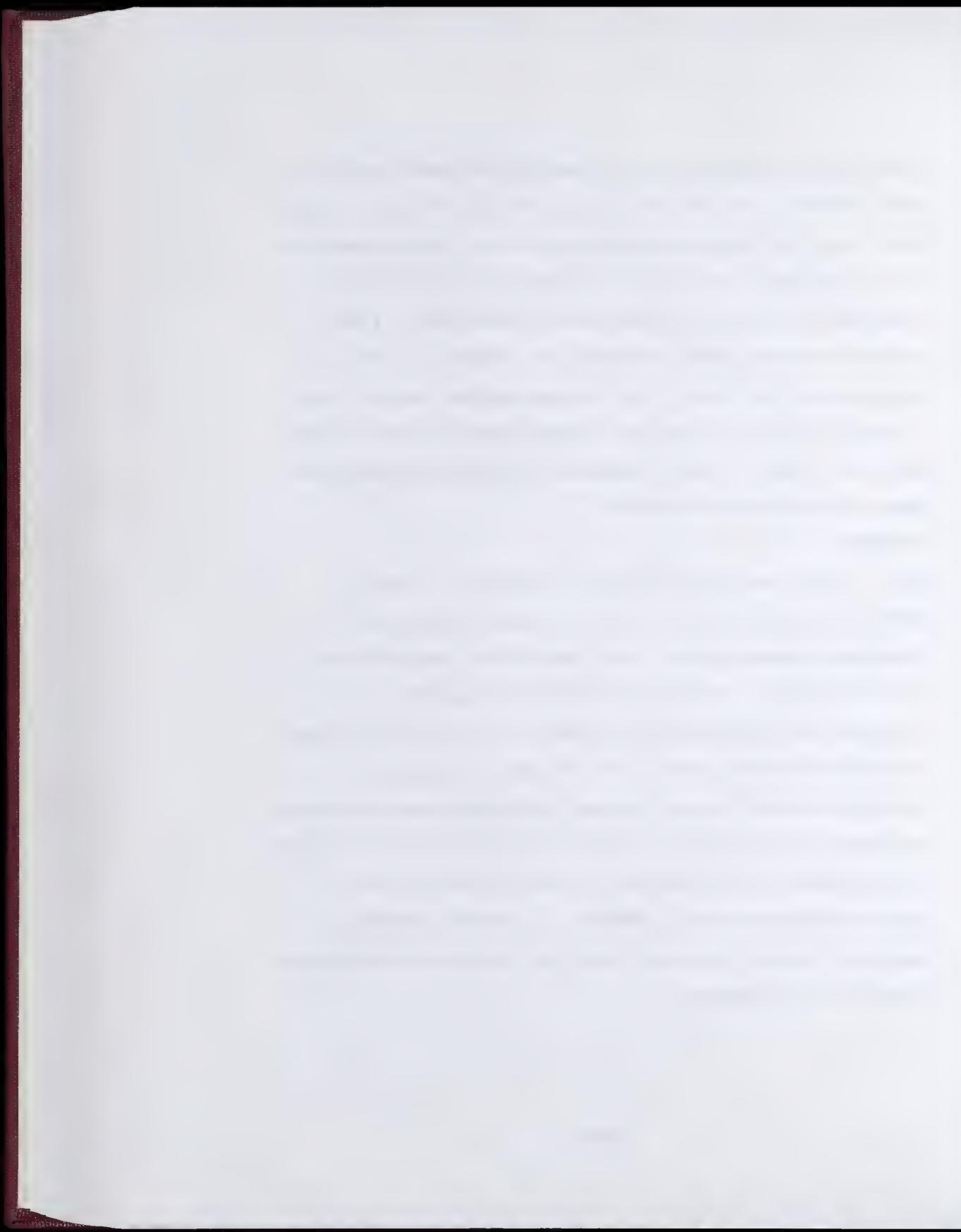
So I haven't been in the Century that often in recent years. I was asked to write the obituary in memoriam for Sumner Crosby, which I did. But the only other major event was when the presidency and the trustees of the Century polled the membership on the sale of the William Sidney Mount painting that Mount had given to the Century back when he was a member. I got a letter from the committee on the collection asking if I wished to join with them in protesting this suggestion. And I said I did very much indeed wish to. The management trustees of the Century wanted to sell the Mount, which they thought was worth something like \$8 million, in order to establish a fund from which the repairs on the building and all these operational and maintenance problems could be solved. There were some of us, including Charlie [Charles] Cunningham, who thought this was not a good idea in a club with so many well-known and, in many, many cases, wealthy people. At the Century, there surely would be some way which they could make a campaign to raise money for operational support. The Century had been founded over a hundred years ago by these artists and continued as a



major artistic thing. The collection had been there for that purpose. It was just simply unconscionable to invade that trust and just remove it in order to raise money for fixing the roof. So I wrote a letter in support to the president and I got a rather tart letter back. I've forgotten exactly what he said, but, anyhow, I took exception to his reply. So I wrote another letter, which I made a little bit more astringent than my first letter, and I got just I think a postcard or something about no basis for further discussion.

GARDNER: Oh!

LEE: And so they finally sold the painting. The painting, as a matter of fact, was purchased by the Cleveland Museum of Art. And they didn't pay anything like \$8 million. They didn't get anything like that. But I'm glad the painting is in Cleveland, where it's in good company and can be seen. And I'm very sorry that the Century has lost one of its best paintings that goes with the other paintings that had been part of the heart of the Century Association and what it was all about. But I maintain my membership. There is, I think, probably a degree of vanity involved here, but it's a great club and I enjoy being a member.

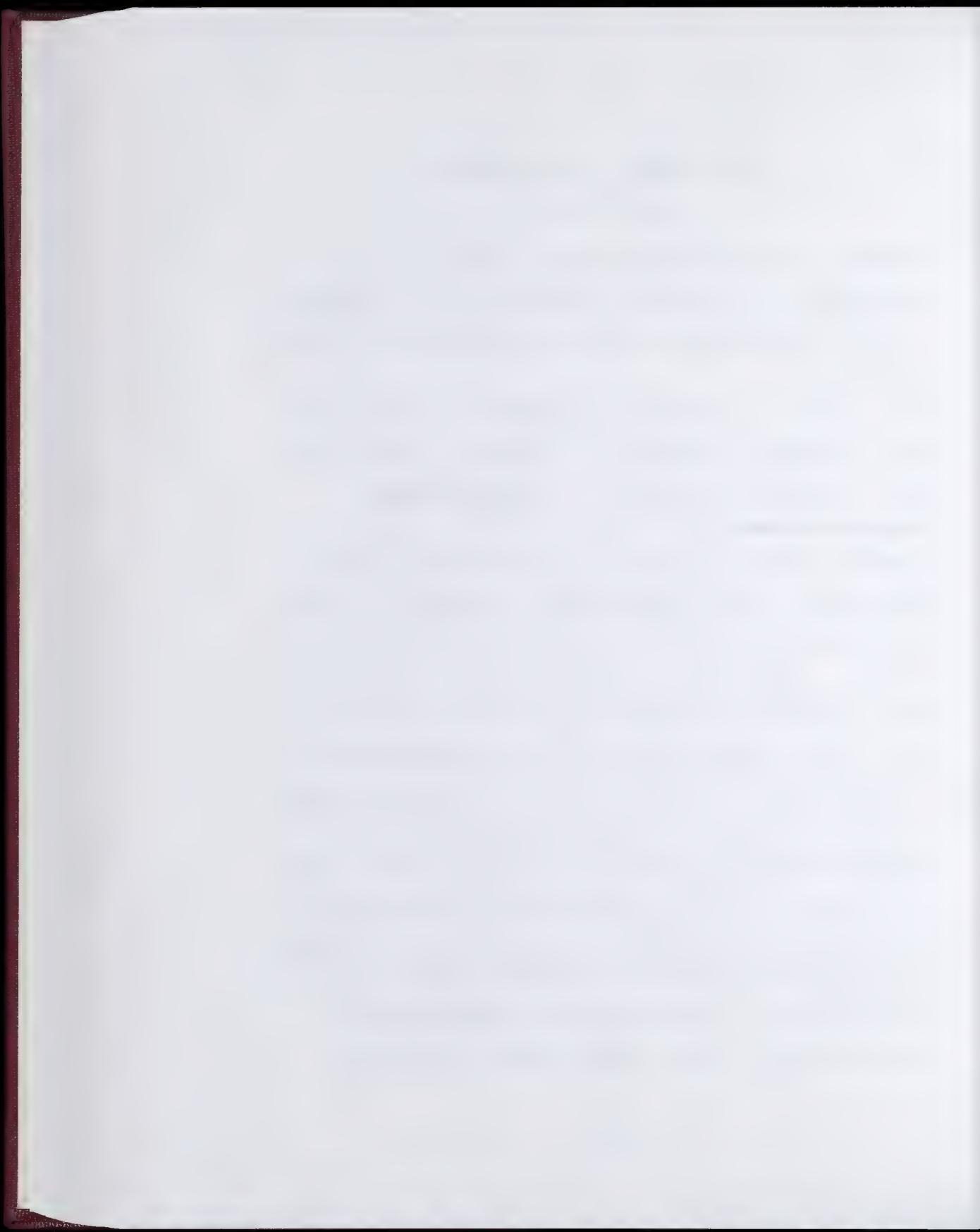


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JULY 16, 1992

GARDNER: Tell me about Sumner [M.] Crosby and your friendship with him and the whole notion of the two of you as fishing companions, which is something that hasn't come in here yet.

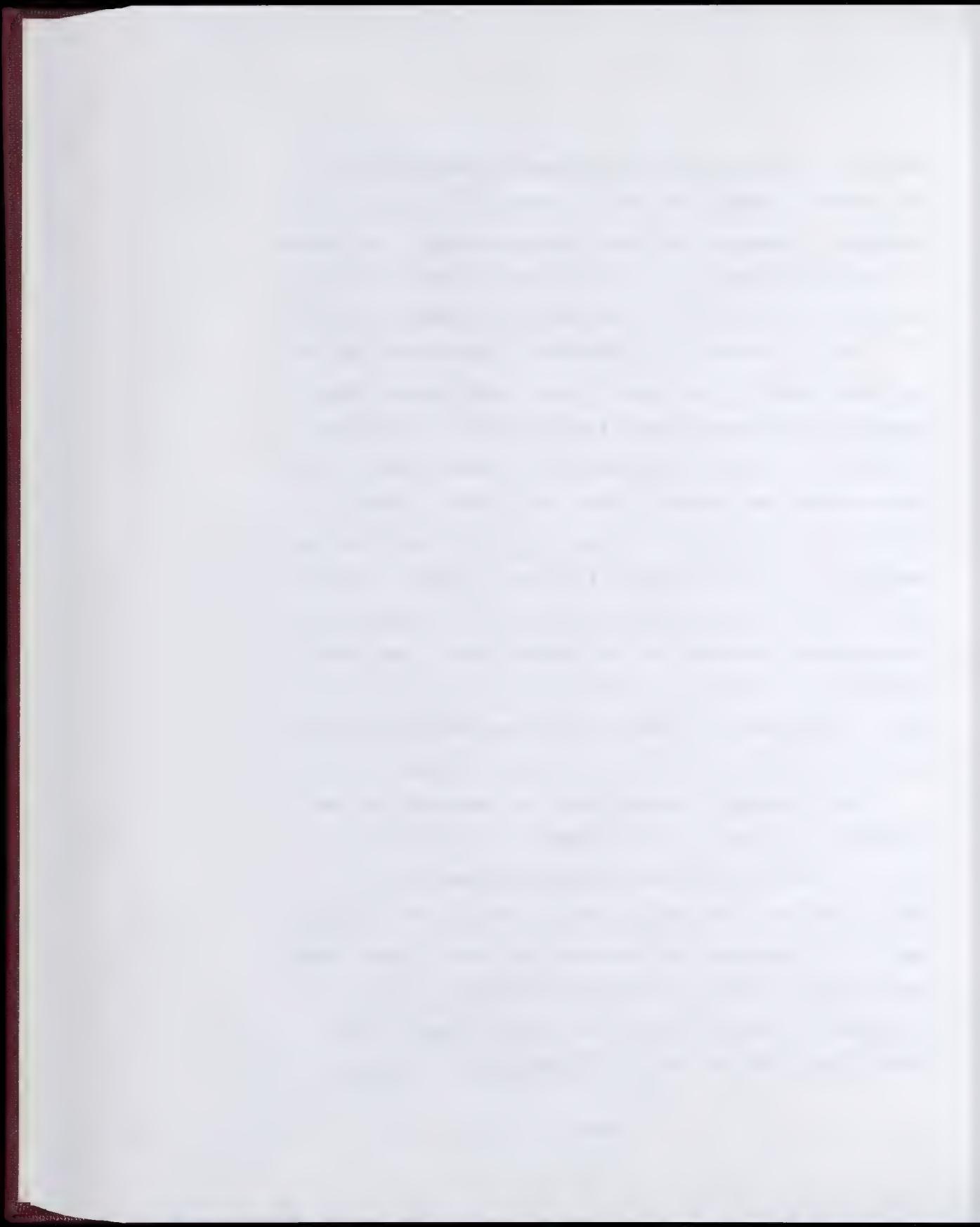
LEE: Well, I've always been interested in fishing. My father [Emery H. Lee] was not a fisherman. I don't know how I happened to run across it. Field and Stream magazine or something or other. About at the age of eleven, I decided I wanted to go trout fishing. And my grandmother [Carrie Johnston Baker] was always, as I think I mentioned, very indulgent. I was able to buy a steel fly rod. I mean, that's unthinkable today. Of course, in those days they didn't cost all that much, maybe a dollar and a half or something like that. And some cheap reel. I tried to find out--I think it was in the New York Times--where you can go trout fishing. Among other places, it mentioned Brewster, New York, on a river up there. Open to the public. And also a stream that flowed into Lake Ronkonkomo on Long Island. So my poor family was dragooned. My grandmother, my father, mother [Adelia Baker Lee], in a car and we went. First time I went fishing was Lake Ronkonkomo, and I didn't catch a thing. But it was



beautiful. That's now all developed in the area, but it was beautiful woods and lake and what they called "Indian slippers," these orchid-like flowers growing in the woods. It was just wonderful. I always have had an interest in nature in the sense of forest, woods, streams, and so on.

Then I tried it up at Brewster. My parents took me up there early in the season. Soon after opening day there would be dozens, sometimes hundreds of fishermen. Not much. And then I discovered Flat Brook, which is in northwestern New Jersey up near Port Jervis. There I actually saw a man catch a trout on a fly. That was very exciting. This was three or four years before I caught a fish. So I've always been nuts about fly-fishing. And I persuaded my family to let me stay--I think I was about thirteen or fourteen, just before we left New York--for four or five days at a farmhouse on the Neversink River up near the Catskills so I could go trout fishing.

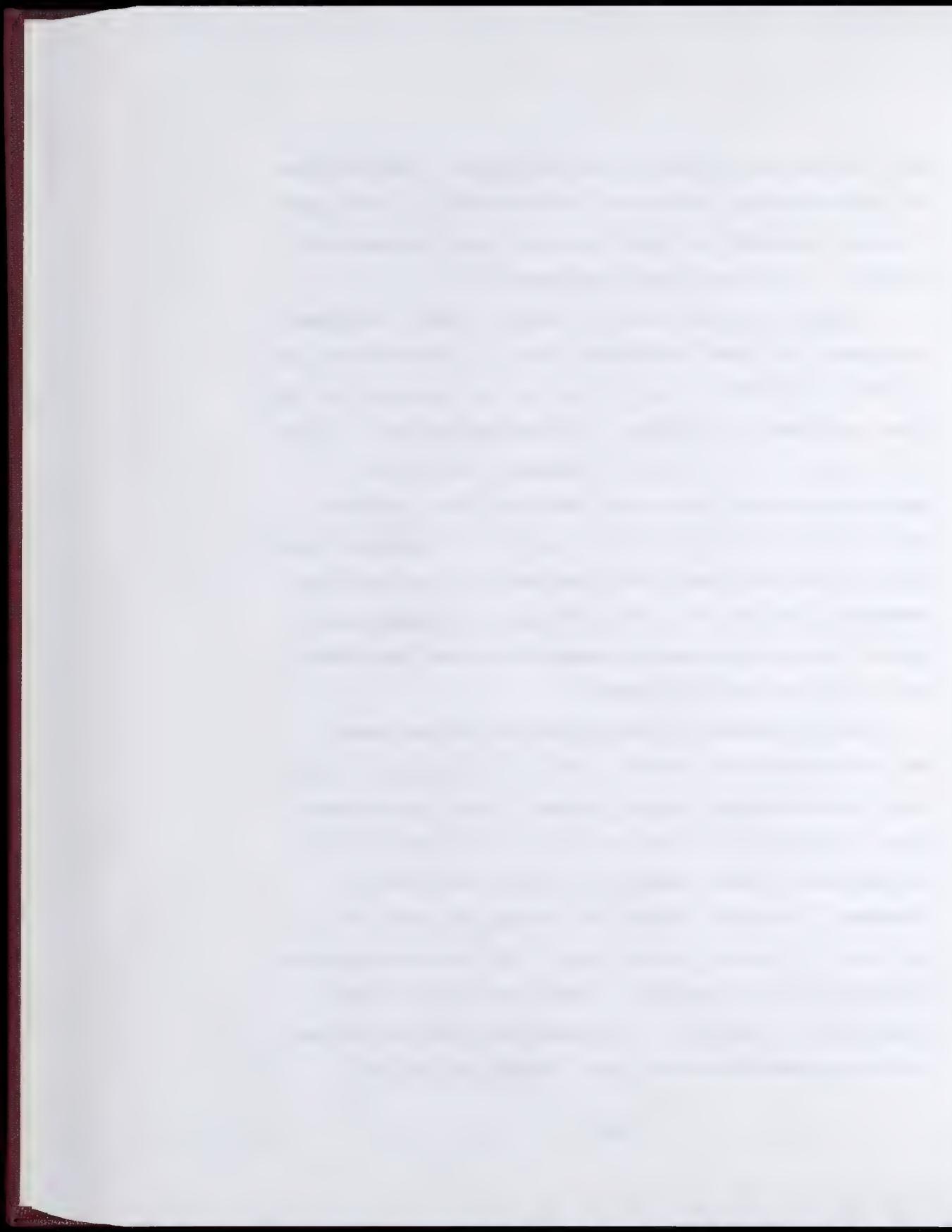
Then I couldn't do much with it, certainly in the Cleveland area when I was a student or in Washington [D.C.]. When I was an undergraduate at American University, the chemistry professor [William B. Holton] was a fly-fisherman. He was also the tennis coach, which was the only reason I ever passed chemistry, because [laughter] I was the number one singles player on the tennis team. But he was a fly-fisherman. A very good



one. We went up to what is now Camp David. This was open to public fishing. Beautiful little stream up there where I caught fish with him, and he taught me a lot about fly-fishing. I've always been interested in it.

So when my family moved to Detroit, when I went home from school or when I was there living, I went fishing up on the Au Sable River near Mio in the northern part of the lower peninsula of Michigan. I liked camping out. I used to go up when I was fifteen or sixteen, when I was beginning college, to Mio and just camp there by myself and go fishing with some of the local fly-fishermen. When my wife [Ruth Ward Lee] and I were married, we spent our honeymoon, believe it or not, hiking on the Appalachian Trail, which made her mother absolutely burst into tears. So I've always been interested.

Well, I happened to meet Crosby on the boat when I was coming back from Europe in the early sixties and his wife [Sarah Townsend Crosby], a very lively, attractive lady. We hit it off--just met on the boat. He started talking about salmon fishing. I said I was a trout fisherman, I'd never fished for salmon. He said, "Well, you ought to come up to our place." He's from one of the Minneapolis flour companies. Sumner was one of these second sons. I believe I mentioned that. So he invited me to go salmon fishing up on a-- There are two main

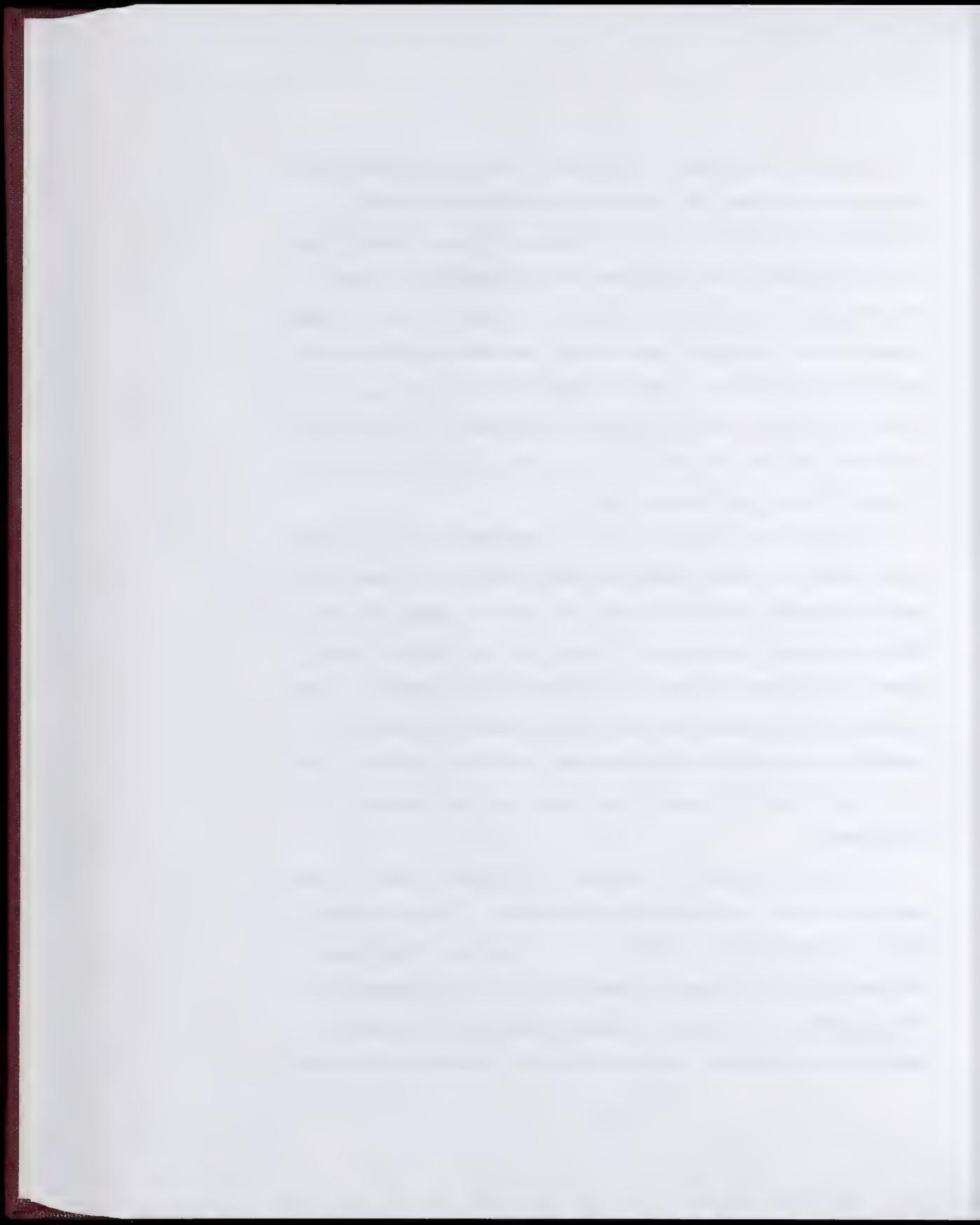


rivers up in that area, the Gaspé. One is the Upsalquitch River, which flows in from New Brunswick into the Restigouche River, and the Restigouche River, which forms the border for a while between New Brunswick and Quebec. He and his family, one member of his family, and friends owned a small fishing lodge up on the Restigouche River, which was one of the great salmon rivers of the past and I guess still is. And it's quite expensive. He asked me if I'd like to come but that I would have to share expenses.

I said, "Sure. We'd love to."

So Ruth and I went up there. We used to go up then every year for about seven or eight years in a row, and I was introduced to fly-fishing for salmon, which is one of the most exciting sports, I think, in the world. And since that time Ruth and I have gone with friends: Joe [Joseph] McCullough, who was the director of the art institute in Cleveland [Cleveland Institute of Art], and with our friend in Japan, Yuji Abe, who was a crazy fisherman.

We went fishing in Ireland. We found a nice stream which was very good and not many people. Very inexpensive. In Scotland I tried it. I've gotten fish there, but basically it's been a terribly long time between fish, because the whole salmon fishing industry for Atlantic salmon has gotten to be so difficult, so expensive with



the netting and poaching. Unless you're in on some ancient stream where your family has owned the beats for two hundred years, you pay a fortune. Yuji Abe and I paid quite a bit of money to go fishing in Iceland. We went to northern Iceland just before the summit meeting at Reykjavik--two weeks before the summit meeting. We did quite well in northern Iceland, but it's so remote there's nothing to do except fish. There are very few trees and the river is very difficult to fish. But at least there were salmon there and we got them. But it's been very difficult. The last few years we've tried a very nice place in England which is on the border between Cornwall and Devon, but to no avail.

That's how I got to be a good friend of Sumner Crosby's. Sumner was the head of the department towards the end, and he was the victim of sort of a palace revolution at Yale [University] in which younger professors, including the famous Vincent Scully, succeeded in getting him out as the chairman of the department because he's very conservative. He was the authority on the abbey of Saint-Denis in Paris, and he published many articles. Then he had a terrible time bringing his work to a conclusion. But I think he basically did finally, and then, unfortunately, he died not too long ago.

GARDNER: Thank you. The next on my list is the Asia



Society.

LEE: Well, the Asia Society, of course, was a natural because of their-- They had a gallery--the Asia [House] Gallery--first in the building that was designed by Philip Johnson, down on East Sixty-fourth Street. And they had usually a show in the spring and a show in the fall and maybe a summer show. Before I ever became an adviser to John [D.] Rockefeller [III], I was active with them. They have a gallery committee which advises them on exhibitions and so on. I was asked to be on that early on, I think before I was director, in the fifties. It just was a natural relationship and one which has been a continuing one right up to the present day. Its program became very strong when I became adviser to John Rockefeller because the disposition of his collection was a matter of great interest to the Asia Society.

I was very active. I became chairman of that gallery committee, which is still in existence, and I'm still chairman. And I will be going off as chairman next year. When they decided to move the headquarters of the Asia Society from Sixty-fourth Street to a new and larger building up on Seventieth [Street] and Park [Avenue], I was one of the members of the building committee and I advised them on the selection of the architect and development of the gallery areas in the building. So I've

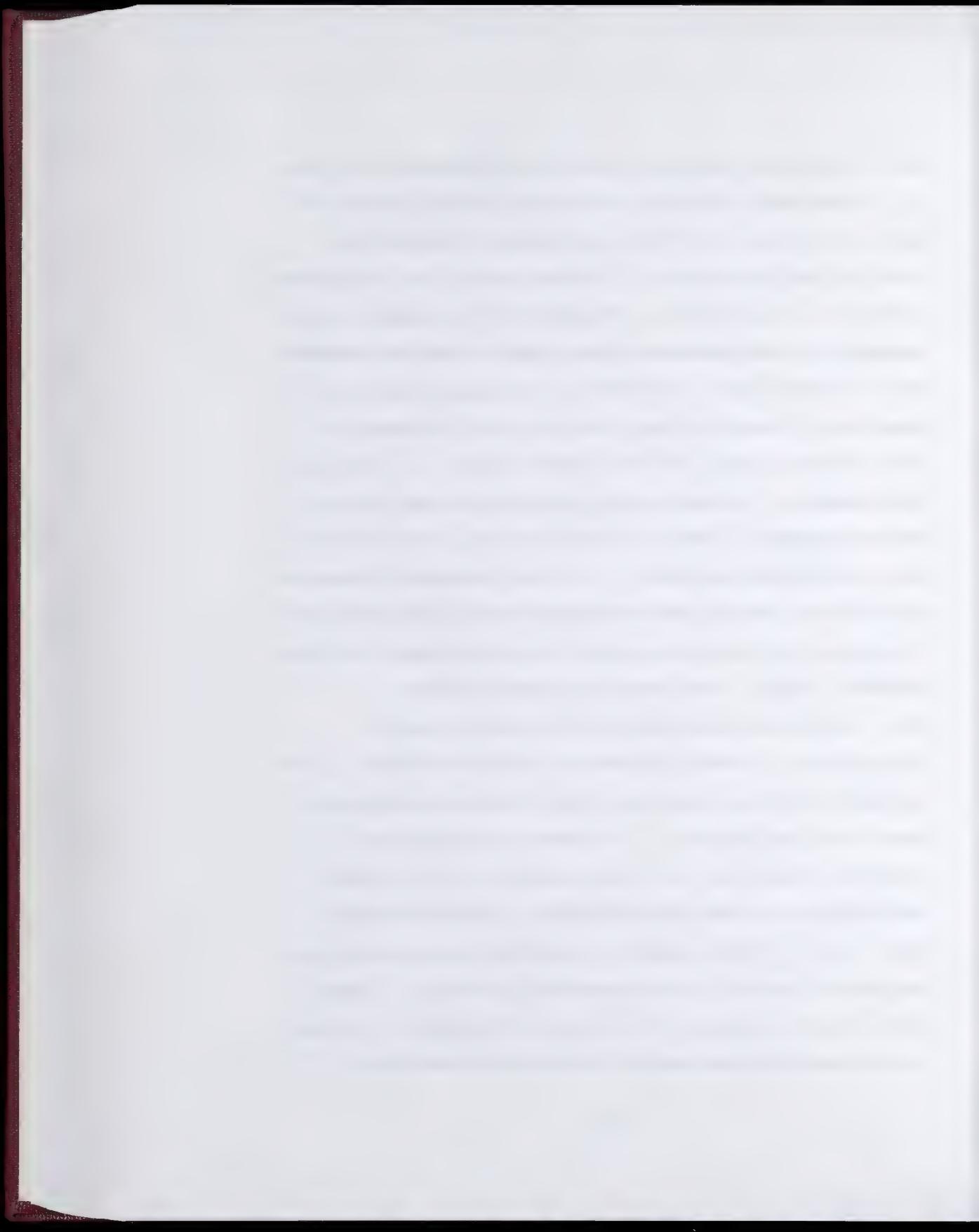


had a continuing and very friendly relationship with them.

I was made a trustee in the late sixties, maybe the early seventies, and I'm now an honorary trustee, for life, of the Asia Society. I've enjoyed it and found them a wonderful organization. The board of trustees is a very interesting, well-balanced group, quite a few businessmen, more in recent years than before, but people also from Hong Kong. Joseph Ho-tung, who's a great collector of early Chinese jades, and then Johnny [Myron T.] Falk, who died recently. He was a great collector in New York of Chinese ceramics. There's Cynthia Polski, who collects very good Indian material. It's just intimately concerned with Asia in general and very specifically with Asian art. Of course, that's been my cup of tea for a long, long time.

GARDNER: Right. What about the Japan Society?

LEE: Well, same thing except in a special area of Japanese art. I was a trustee of that for a while. I was on their building committee. They finally had not gone ahead with the building. I've been on the gallery committee there, and, as I mentioned, we did a couple of exhibitions for them from Cleveland. It too has been a very, very, I think, mutually rewarding relationship, and one which I wouldn't have missed for the world. Cyrus Vance was the chairman of the board of trustees. You get to talk and know the people like that who have real



breadth and knowledge, and it's a very, very positive experience. I feel very lucky to have been able to be related so closely with both the Asia Society and the Japan Society.

GARDNER: Where's the Japan Society located?

LEE: I think it's 333 East Forty-seventh Street. It's right by the United Nations. They have a very nice building designed by a Japanese architect, a modern building and very attractive. If you've never been there, you ought to go there. They have regular programs of dance and music and the art gallery, and they have a library. It's really a very, very attractive place. The Asia Society is too, but the new building has not been received all that favorably by the cognoscenti. But it's a good building in many ways. It's just that I think they haven't been able to come to grips with how to deal with things like the lobby, for example. Have you been to the Asia Society?

GARDNER: No, I haven't.

LEE: Well, you better go there too.

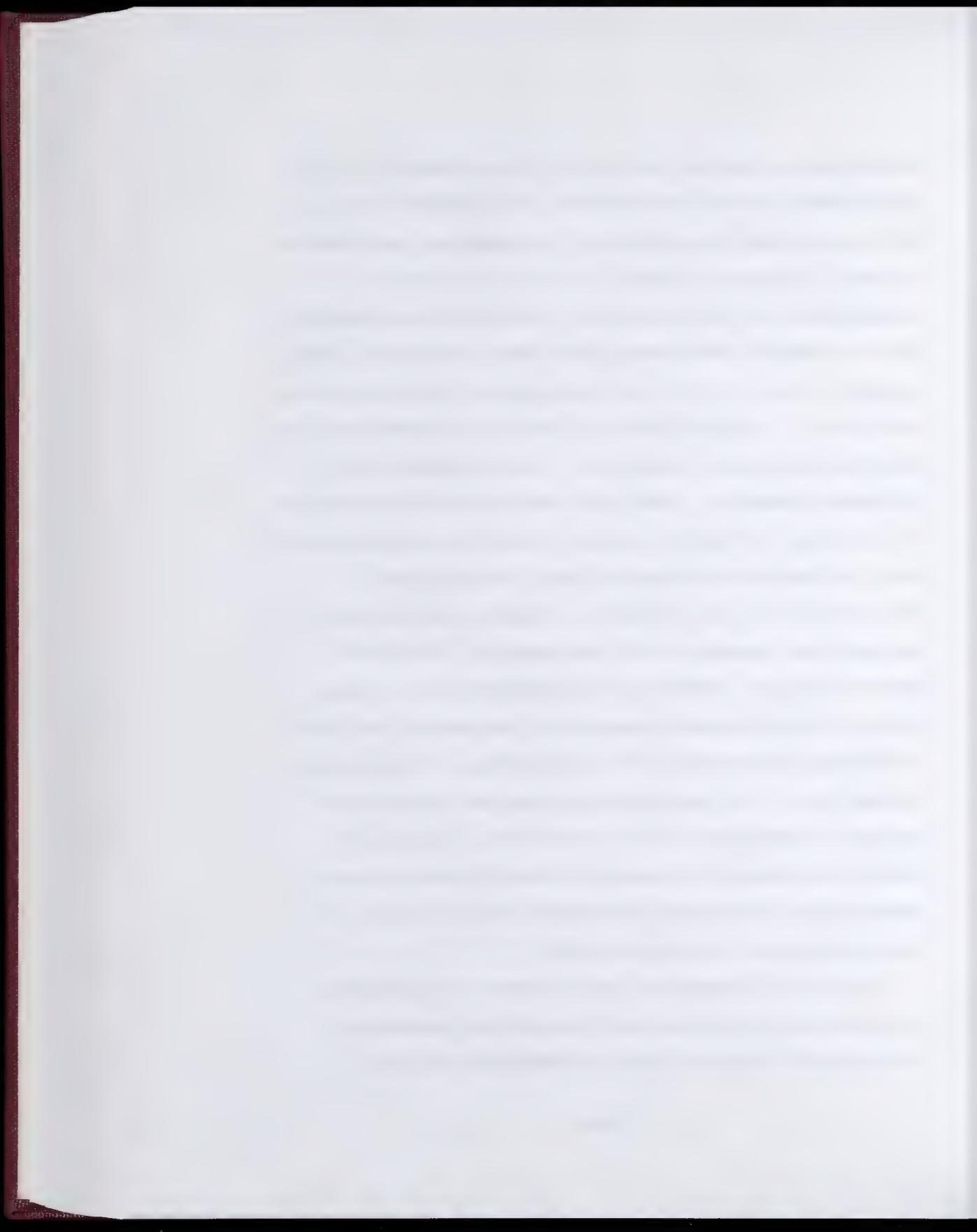
GARDNER: Well, it's on my next visit to New York.

LEE: Oh, absolutely! And, you see, the Rockefeller collection now-- That gets back to what I was going to say, because the Asia Society, of course, was very, very anxious and interested as to what the disposition of the



Rockefeller collection was to be. Fairly early on in my relationship with Mr. Rockefeller, the question came up, and he wanted me to advise him. He asked me, as a matter of fact, to prepare a paper for him on alternative dispositions for the collection. Ruling out any selling of it at auction or anything like that; in essence, what should be done with it? And where should it go to do the most good? I tried to think as coolly and objectively and sympathetically as I could, and I came up with three different scenarios. One, that the collection be given in its entirety to the Asia Society, where it would provide a basic collection on a smaller scale than the vast collections that are available in Boston and New York, the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] for example. But that emphasis be upon aesthetics and experience but closely tied to the educational purposes of the society and the increasing appreciation and understanding of the culture of East Asia. The second alternative was to give the entire collection to an art institution, a major art institution where the receipt of that collection would substantially complement and dramatically increase the effectiveness of that institution.

The third alternative was to break the collection into discrete units that had a cogent and persuasive intellectual framework, such as Cambodian sculpture,



Indian bronzes, Japanese art, Far Eastern ceramics, and play with the different concepts, and then to place these units in institutions where they would become important, where they particularly filled a sadly missing area. For example, the Freer art gallery [Freer Gallery of Art], Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, has no Cambodian works to my knowledge. They have some Gandhara material, they have some medieval Indian material, but nothing of Southeast Asia. And as an example, that would be where that particular unit block would have a big impact.

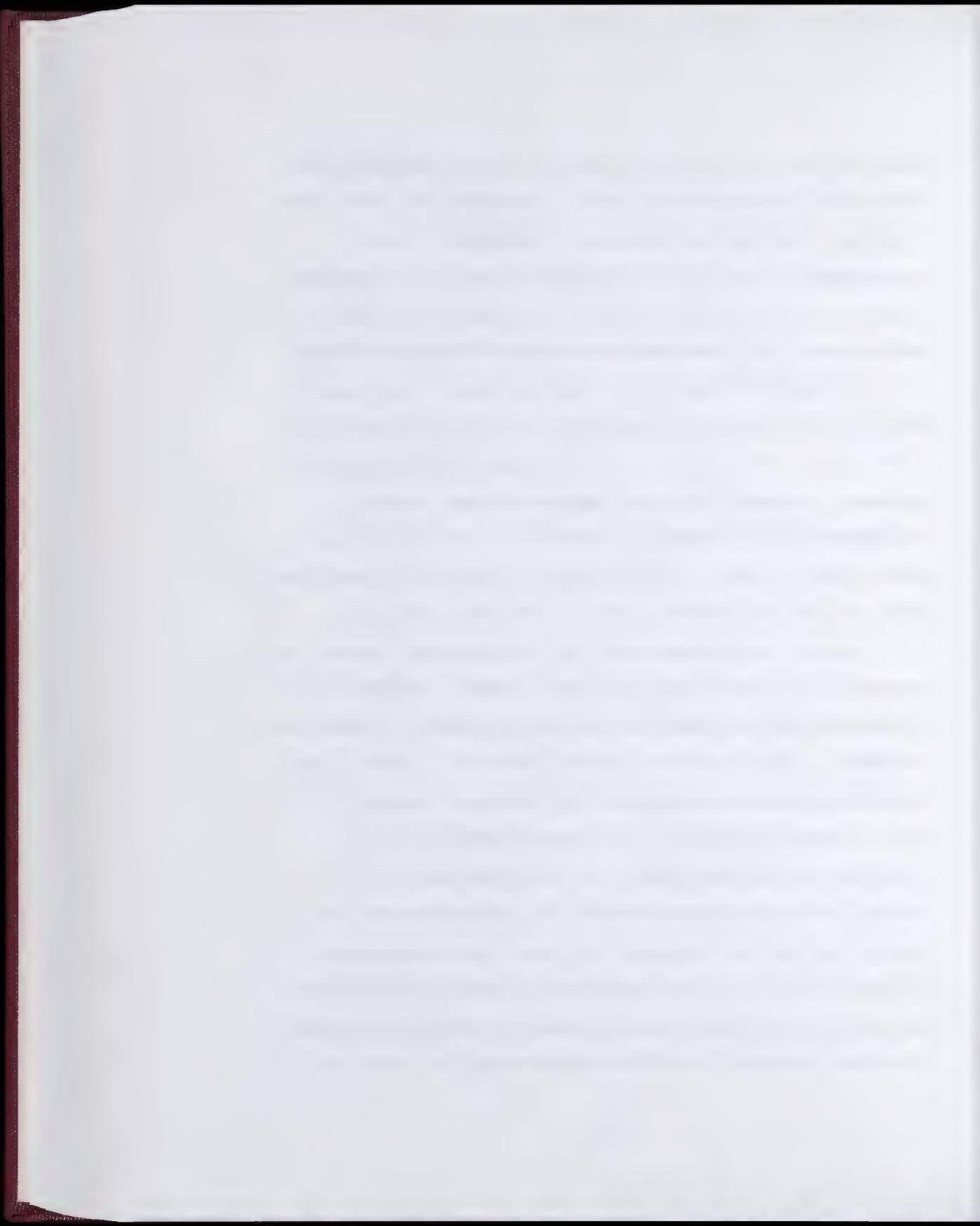
Retain the Rockefeller name, of course, as the donation, but make it flexible enough so that they weren't required to have it exhibited as a separate unit in a separate environment, make it flexible enough so that it could be integrated with the collection, and because of that, it would seriously improve it. I indicated to him that I thought the last alternative was the preferable one. I thought the collection would have a greater impact and would do more good for more different people in more different areas than any other solution.

Several museums were after it. It was a question of great concern and of great interest to a lot of people. And John made a decision and he basically felt that he wanted it to be kept together. He didn't want to break it up into discrete units and he didn't want it to be



swallowed up in a large collection like the Metropolitan or Boston [Museum of Fine Arts]. He wanted it to be kept together. And he was seriously interested in the contemplative aspects of oriental culture and he was very much in favor of a disposition of the collection that would permit it to be used as a source for understanding the contemplative aspects of Asian culture. The idea of having the collection as small and quiet but silent and effective in that kind of an environment appealed greatly to him. So that's what he finally decided, he and Blanchette [Ferry Hooker Rockefeller]. Blanchette was also a major factor in the decision. And that's what they did. So the collection is now at the Asia Society.

One of the problems that has developed is that in the current intellectual and cultural climate, contemplative intentions and environments are not precisely a number one priority. More and more, there's interest in what I call entertainment and excitement. At the Asia Society, I think there is a serious uncertainty involving the trustees and the management and the professionals in charge of the gallery as to how to use the Rockefeller collection and at the same time have their exhibition program and at the same time have a kind of interest and excitement and entertainment component that the management felt was important in order to get people to come into a



still not terribly well known entity. I think they're beginning to get that worked out. They've got a very active and bright director for the galleries now. As a matter of fact, she used to work in Cleveland. Vishaka Desai [Oxnam]. She was in the educational department for a while. I think they're beginning to work it out, but it's just another symptom of tensions and problems that exist generally in our culture.

GARDNER: Next I'd like to ask you about the [Isamu] Noguchi Foundation, on which you serve as a trustee.

LEE: Well, I can't remember a specific date. I met Noguchi on one or two occasions in New York, in terms of getting to know him and understand him, and our friendship developed. The impetus was provided by the producing of the sculpture for the Justice Center in Cleveland, Portal. Noguchi did a fantastic job. I was absolutely impressed by his artistry but also by his technological know-how and ingenuity. Because we didn't have a big budget, we were lucky to get-- I think we had a total budget of \$70,000 or \$75,000 for sculptural embellishment for this huge Justice Center, which included a jail. A big, big thing. So the major sculpture at the entrance had to be something that was big, and of course how do you get something big where you're going to be able to spend a maximum for that particular work of something in the neighborhood of



\$50,000? We ended up with a sculpture of thirty-- I think it's thirty-six feet high. Isamu remembered that they were doing the Alaska pipeline and they had made special pipe for that pipeline of unusually large dimensions.

GARDNER: Three feet.

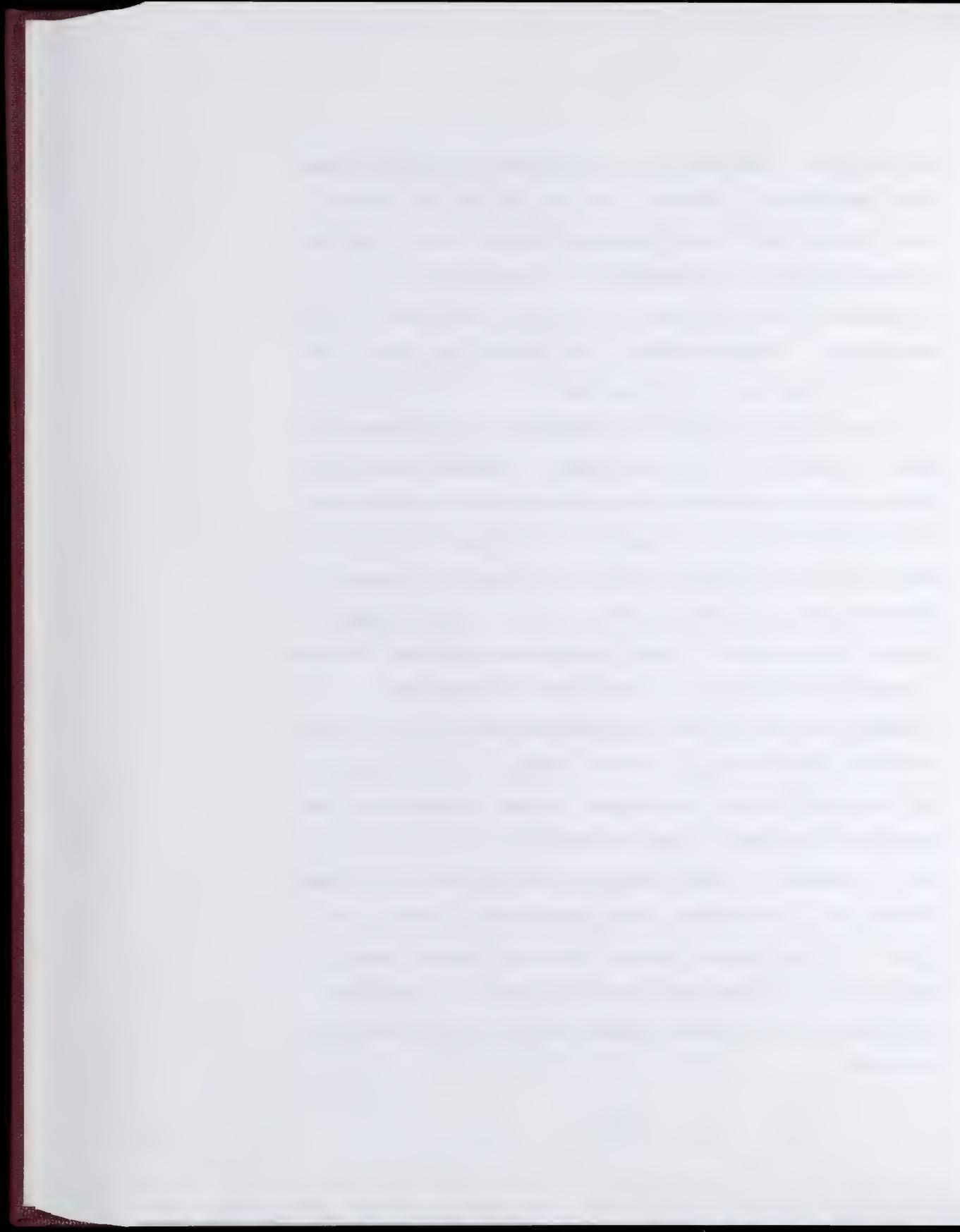
LEE: No, I think it's forty-eight inch diameter. He checked and found out if they had any left and could still produce it. And he was able to get the pipe company to produce the pipe and also the forty-five- and ninety-degree-angle joints that were required for his design. Fabrication was done in Cleveland at one of the smaller steel fabricating plants, a family operation. They were very interested in this project, from a technological point of view, and they could see that Isamu knew his stuff. He wasn't just an artist coming way out; he knew his stuff. And they worked together very well.

Then I saw him after that in New York occasionally and also in Tokyo. I mean, once I was standing at the desk in the Imperial Hotel checking in and I felt somebody sort of goose me from behind. Isamu Noguchi was there. He had about a twenty-foot-long pole with a hand or something at the end of it which was part of a prop, and he had other things that some people were carrying to a Martha Graham dance production. And I ran into him in Kyoto in a small modern art dealer's place not far from



Miyako Hotel. We sort of ran into each other and we were very sympathetic. Then we were able to get the Putnam Fund--thanks to Mildred Putnam and Peter Putnam, her son--to fund the big set of sculptures, three granite sculptures outside the main, now north, entrance of the Breuer wing. That involved a lot of back and forth. So we got to know each other very well.

Then when he set up the foundation, well before he died, to operate the [Isamu] Noguchi [Garden] Museum and also ultimately to handle his estate and the development of the museum and the cooperative relationship with the people at his Mure studio outside Takamatsu in Japan, he asked me if I would be willing to be a trustee of the Noguchi Foundation. I said I would be delighted. We had a very good relationship. Then when he died very suddenly, we had all the problems involved with the estate and then just setting up of the more or less, not final, but complete form of the museum in Long Island City. We also have responsibilities for the sale of works of art for the benefit of the foundation and the museum in Long Island City. We meet at least four times a year in New York. It's an ongoing thing. We have a fairly small board, but it's fascinating to deal with it. Have you ever been to the museum in Long Island City? I bet you haven't.



GARDNER: I haven't been to Long Island City since I was about four.

LEE: Well, it's an experience. It's a gorgeous museum with an outdoor garden, Japanese style, with his sculptures. It's a loft interior. It's about a block and a half from where-- God, names! Oh, he's a famous sculptor--big hanging steel pieces. There's one at the Hirshhorn [Museum]. [Mark Di Suvero] Well, he has a huge perhaps three- or four-acre area and a warehouse next to it, where a lot of his big sculptures are still that have not found a place. So that's interesting to see too. "The Isamu Noguchi Sculpture Garden and Museum" is the title. It's on Vernon Boulevard in Queens, Long Island City, and I urge you to go see it. It's beautiful. Just beautiful.

GARDNER: Okay. Now I have three things on my next trip.

LEE: Yes.

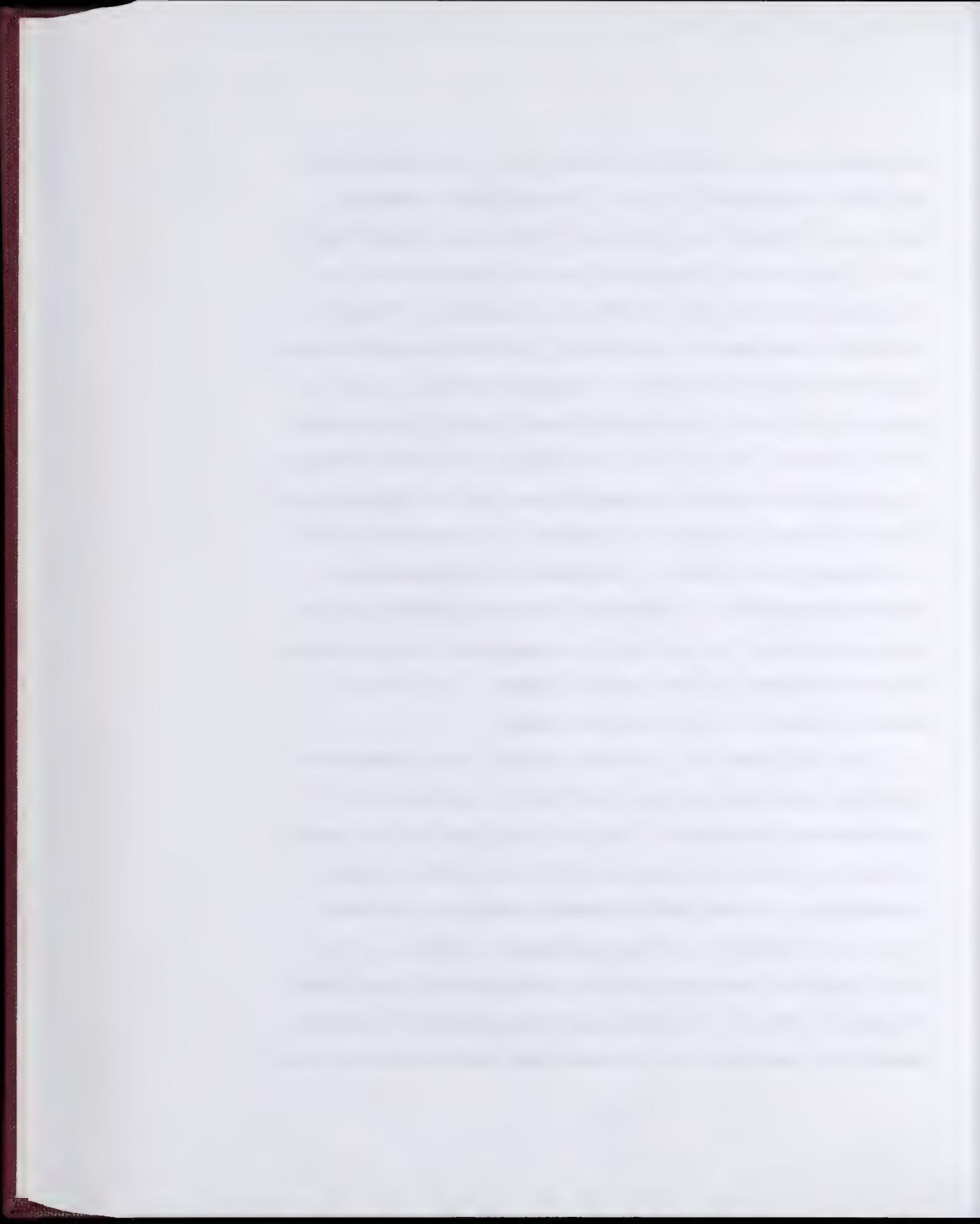
GARDNER: Well, you're on the visiting committee of the Freer.

LEE: Freer art gallery, yes. Well, I was appointed to the visiting committee for the Smithsonian Institution. I'll have to say that this happened after [S.] Dillon Ripley retired as the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution because Mr. Ripley and I did not hit it off too well together. The visiting committee for the



Smithsonian met always in October, and I would always go to Japan in October. I said, "I can't get to these meetings. There's no point and I think you should let me off." And instead, they asked me if I would be on the visiting committee for the Freer art gallery. There's a visiting committee for the Freer. There's also a visiting committee for the [Arthur M.] Sackler Gallery, which is oriental art too. They usually meet jointly, the Sackler and the Freer. But I'm specifically on the Freer because-- I get along fine with the people now, but Mr. Sackler and I were not the greatest of buddies. As a matter of fact, I resigned from a Harvard [University] art department visiting committee. I resigned from that because of the circumstances of the gift of the money and the building of the new addition to the Fogg Art Museum, the [Arthur M.] Sackler Museum, which is another story.

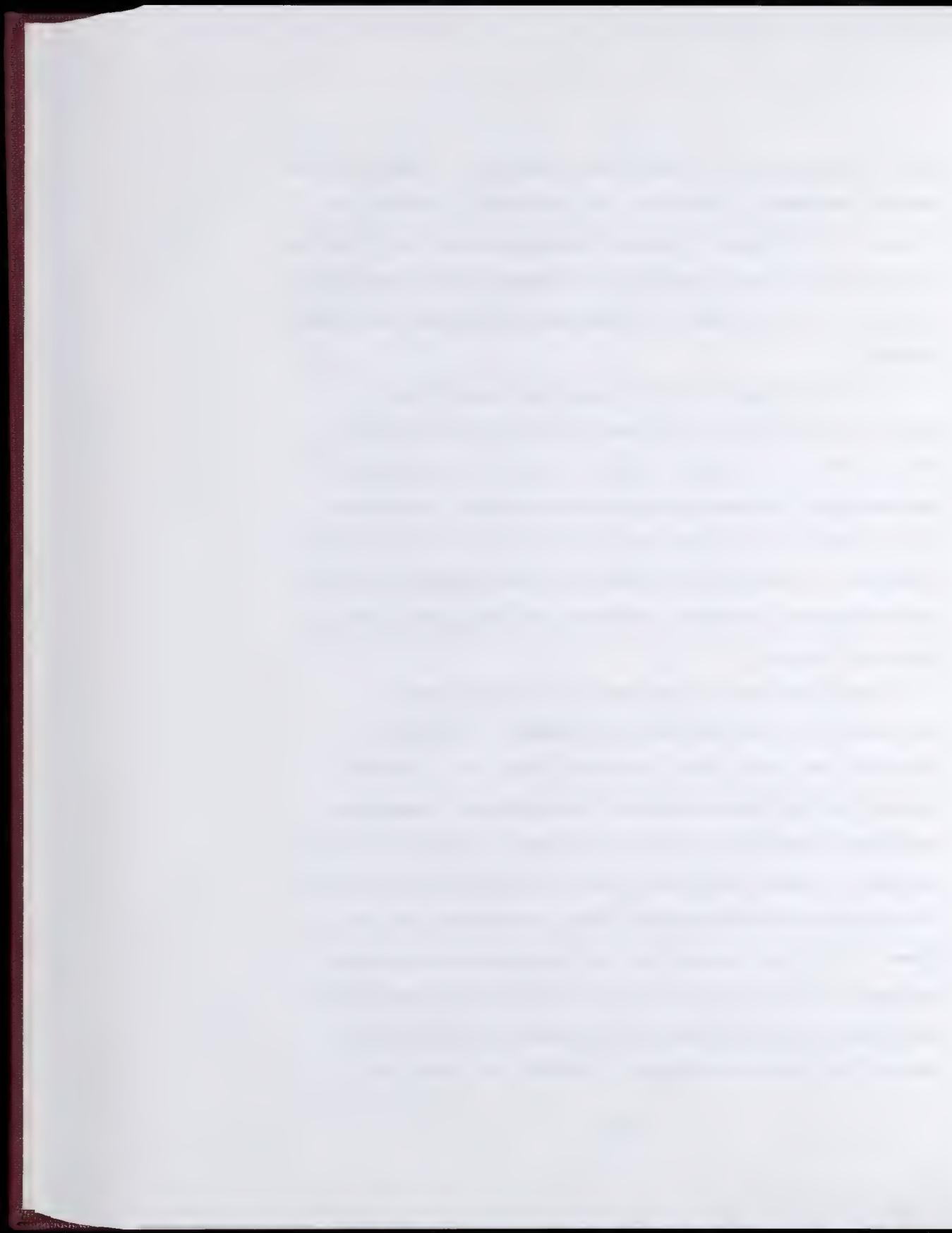
But the Freer is, I think, a very, very interesting visiting committee because the Freer is part of the Smithsonian Institution. Now, it was given to the nation by Charles Freer, who made his fortune in the Pullman Company back in the late nineteenth century. He was a friend of Whistler's and he developed a passion in the late 1930s for American painting through his friend Abbott Thayer and others. American painting, twentieth century, especially that kind of painting that was related in some



ways to oriental art: Whistler, [Thomas W.] Dewing, [John Henry] Twachtman. He had a few paintings by Homer and others, but his great passion became oriental art, and he collected very well under the influence of the people up in Boston like [Ernest F.] Fenollosa and Denman Ross and others.

But the Freer is a very peculiar institution. Anything that enters the Freer Gallery cannot leave it. They can't lend to exhibitions by terms of the bequest. He specified that any gifts could only come in certain ways. The idea is that they had a purchase fund and they acquired. It was to be a museum of the highest quality, maintaining the highest standards of scholarship and so forth and so on.

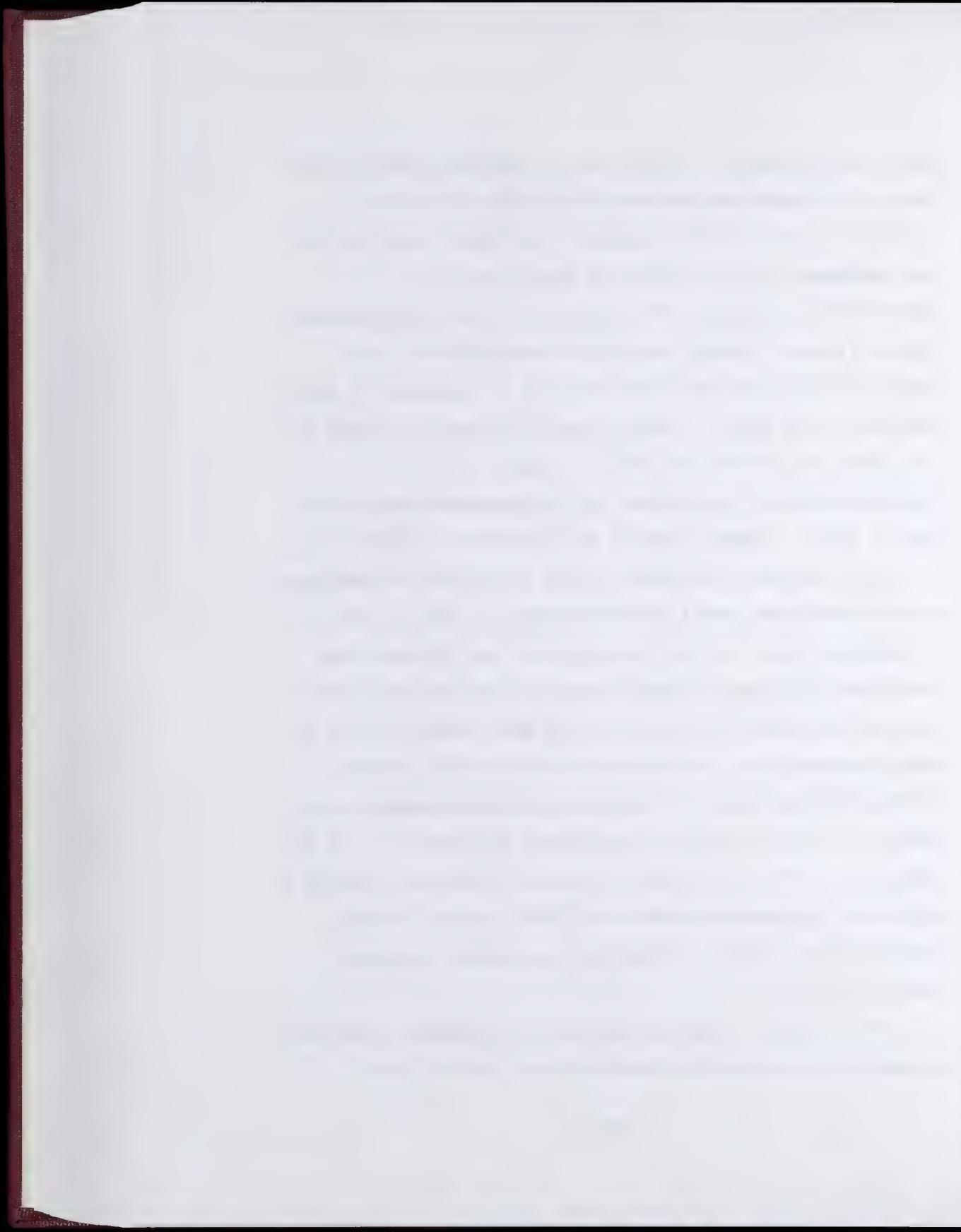
The directors of the Freer have always been sinologists or specialists in Japanese. The first director was Lodge, John Ellerton Lodge, who was the brother of the famous Senator [Henry Cabot] Lodge who defeated Wilson's concept of the League of Nations. He had been curator at Boston, and he tried to stay curator at Boston when he first went down as director of the Freer. And then he gave up the Boston job for obvious reasons. But he was a sinologist, and of course he was succeeded by his handpicked successor, Archibald [G.] Wenley, who was a sinologist. And he, in turn, was



succeeded by John [A.] Pope, who we have mentioned and who was a sinologist and who especially didn't like my approach to oriental art history. And then Pope, in turn, was succeeded by Phil [Phillip] Stern, who was a specialist in Japanese art, and he, in turn, was succeeded by Tom [Thomas] Lawton, who was a sinologist--a good friend of mine and who later asked to be relieved of his administrative duties. He's a senior research curator at the Freer now because he couldn't cope with the Smithsonian under Ripley and his big expansion and glitz and so forth. Anyhow, that's the tradition we have.

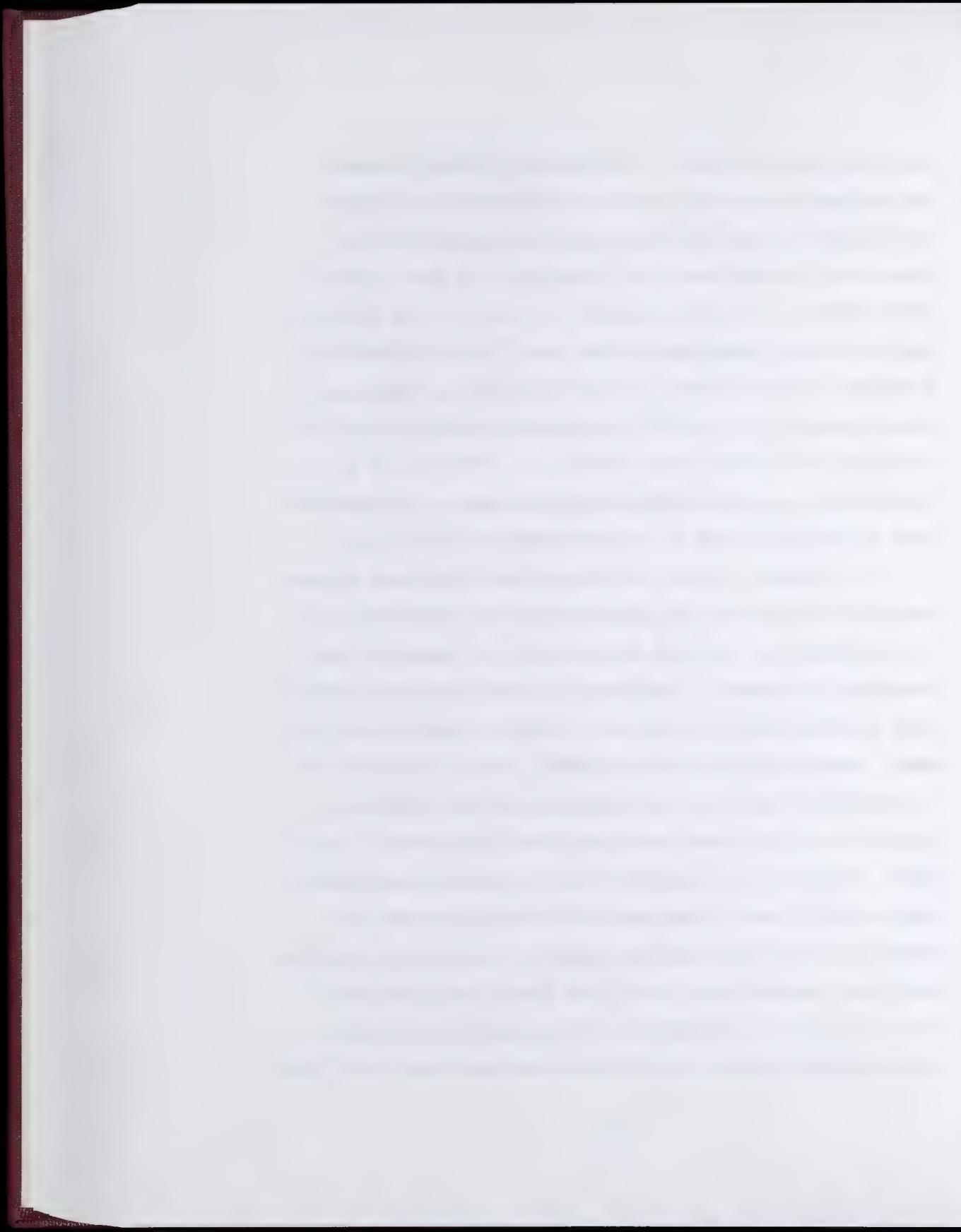
The visiting committee-- Larry [Laurence] Sickman was on the committee, and I think basically I came in and sort of replaced him. We meet once a year, and the meetings have been particularly significant in the last few years because the Freer, as you know, has been going through a total renovation to restore it to its original quality, to enlarge storage areas, bringing conservation spaces up-to-date, etc., etc. So it's been closed for over two and a half years. This is entering the third year now, and it's scheduled to reopen in spring of 1993, in May I think. This has been a very interesting time and we have been helpful I think.

The visiting committee are really an expert group of collectors and curators from different areas: from



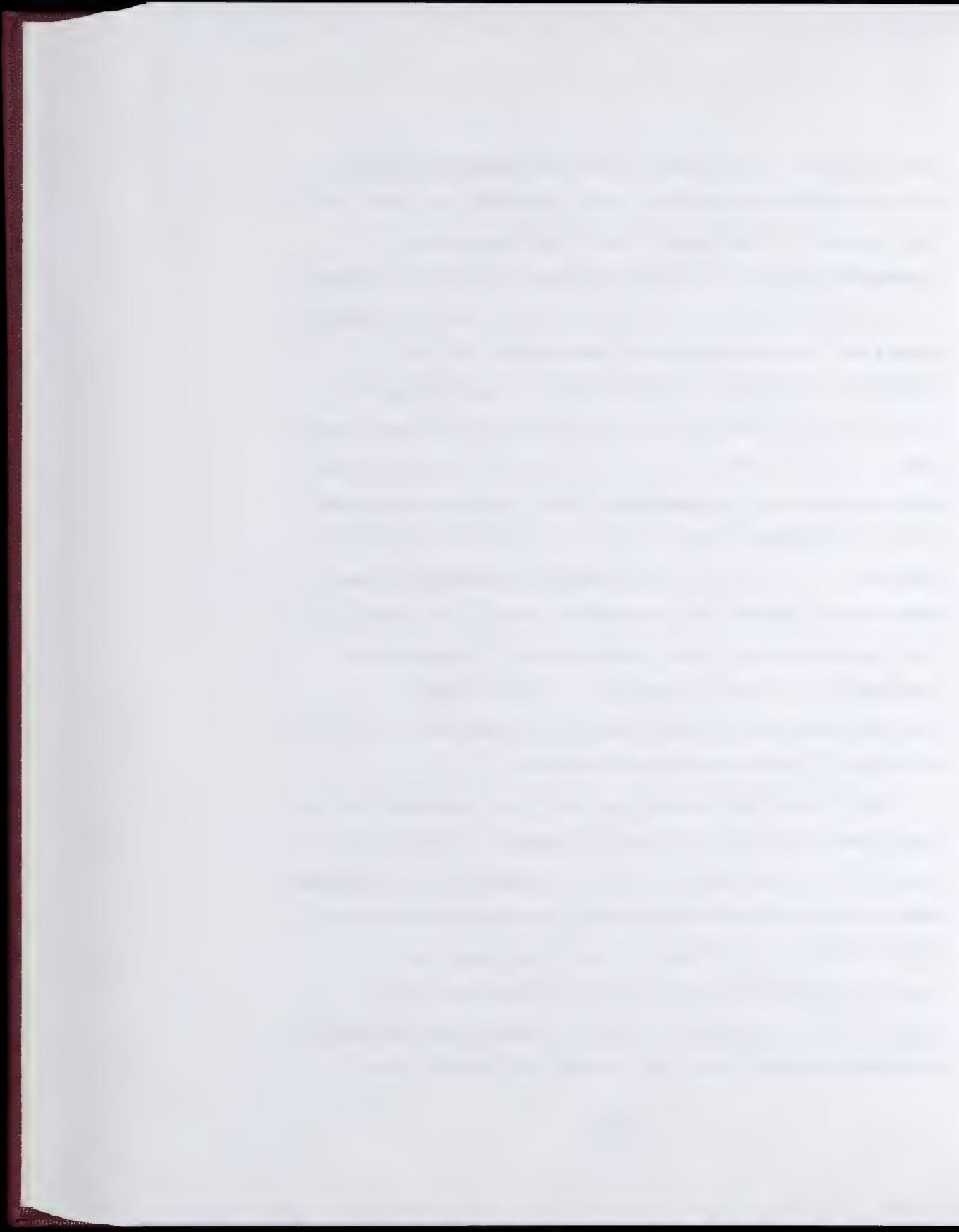
Southeast Asian studies, from Chinese studies, museum people such as myself, and then a few political figures, and Joseph Ho-tung from Hong Kong is a member of the committee. And we meet, as I said, once a year, and we have a fairly good, long agenda. A couple of us make a point of being guardians of the lamp. Marvin Eisenberg, professor of art history at the University of Michigan, whose specialty is Italian Renaissance painting--and I've known him for a long time--he's on it. The two of us, in particular, are constantly trying to find out information that we think we need or the committee needs to know.

For example, one of the things that developed in the course of reports on the progress and the renovation of the building was the need for totally new cases for the ceramics and bronzes. The Freer has had beautiful cases made in their cabinet shop with beautiful hard woods. We said, "What's happening with those?" Well, they weren't suitable and they were too high because the children couldn't see into them, and they have to be lower. And I said, "Why can't you reconstitute the supports and lower them a bit?" Well, they couldn't do that because the chain gear that produces the means of raising and lowering the glass extends down below that level, and they said that the new act of Congress on the impaired would not--They couldn't fulfill the obligations under that act. And



that was news. So Eisenberg and Lee immediately start asking questions about this act. The act, it seems, is very simple. A few pages. But the regulations implementing the act--I've got a copy of this--it's over four hundred pages. Not only that, but there's a special committee in the Smithsonian Institution for the impairment problem, who issue further regulations for within the Smithsonian, as detailed as saying what size type a label should be, what color paper, what the light candle should be for reading a label, the height of the floor for display level of a case. I mean, unbelievably detailed. I think it's an example of bureaucracy gone absolutely, totally out of control. Well, the committee knew nothing about this. So we asked if we could be provided with a copy of the act, a copy of the congressional regulations. We finally got them just the other day. This was a few months ago.

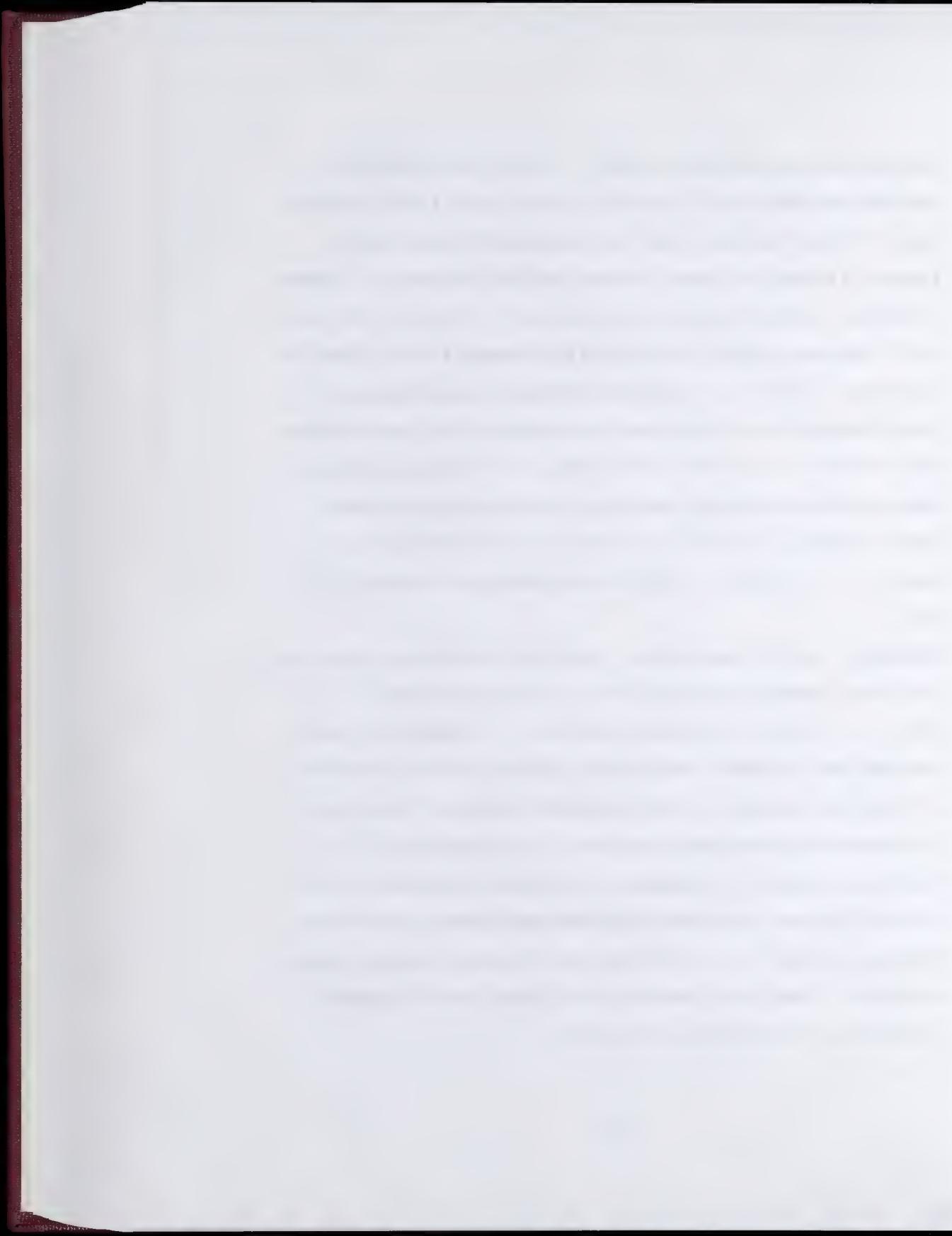
So things keep coming up that-- One collector on the committee is a very important collector of Tibetan and Nepalese art, and he always gives a speech that the Freer should and the Sackler should do more about Tibetan and Nepalese art. And Joseph Ho-tung from Hong Kong is a very, very smart businessman and he asks questions occasionally about their financial operations, income from investment and so forth and so on. So I think the



Smithsonian people worry a bit. I know the director of the Sackler very well, Milo [C.] Beach, and I keep telling him, "If any time you want to kick me off, kick me off, because it must be rather boring for you to have all these sometimes combative questions come up." He said, "Oh, no. No." He says--and it looks as if he means it--he likes to have that. So it's a very interesting thing because it does involve one of the great and distinctive institutions for oriental art in the world; two, it's been a period of change and transition; and three, we've had some impact and something, I think, creative and constructive to do about it. As long as they'll keep asking me to go, I'll go.

GARDNER: You'll keep going. Tell me the Sackler story at the Fogg, unless you think it's not worth telling.

LEE: No, I think it's worth telling. I think it's just another one of these things that kind of go with the turf of the last quarter of the twentieth century. The Fogg Art Museum received many bequests. The Grenville [L.] Winthrop bequest, a fantastic collection of oriental art: Chinese, Korean, and some Japanese sculptures, paintings, bronzes, jades, a great collection of early Chinese jades, so forth. They also received the [Henry Lee] Higginson collection from Boston of Chinese--



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GARDNER: You have just begun to tell the story of Sackler.

LEE: Well, the visiting committee at Harvard was like all visiting committees. They didn't have much power but they did have a considerable-- Especially the ones who are potentially donors to the Fogg, people like Joe [Joseph] Pulitzer [Jr.] and others. It was a congenial group and they met once a year. They had received all these bequests and gifts over a period of years, capped off by the [Maurice] Wertheim gift of impressionist and post-impressionist paintings, which is a very impressive group of major works and enough to fill a whole large-sized gallery. They were just bursting at the seams. And Harvard and its typical attitude of every barrel on its own bottom wouldn't let them deal in the fund-raising work of the university. So they had to go out and raise money. They first raised enough money so they built a big but very economical, low-profile, mostly underground and one story above ground library expansion so they could take care of their great library properly. But they were just bursting at the seams in terms of works of art and so on. So they went out to raise money, and of course they had



asked the visiting committee, especially the people who had dough on the thing, to contribute. They began to raise things, but it was kind of painful. Seymour Slive was then director, and I've known Seymour a long time. He was spending almost all his time, to his disgust, on trying to raise money.

Then I got a phone call from one of my friends who said, "Have you heard about the Sackler gift to the Harvard Fogg Art Museum?"

I said, "No."

"Well," he said, "it was \$5 million, but you ought to know, since I know you're on the visiting committee, that there are all kinds of strings and conditions attached," which in my informant's opinion were onerous, and I think he knew that in my opinion they would be onerous.

I never heard a word from anybody at Harvard about this, you see--nor, as far as I know, had the visiting committee at its last meeting--that even approaches had been made. So I called up Harvard, and I think I talked to Seymour. I said, "Seymour, what is all this about the big bequest? Does that mean you're going to be able to do the building?"

He said, "Oh, yes. It's wonderful," and so forth and so on.

I said, "Well, Seymour, please level with me, because

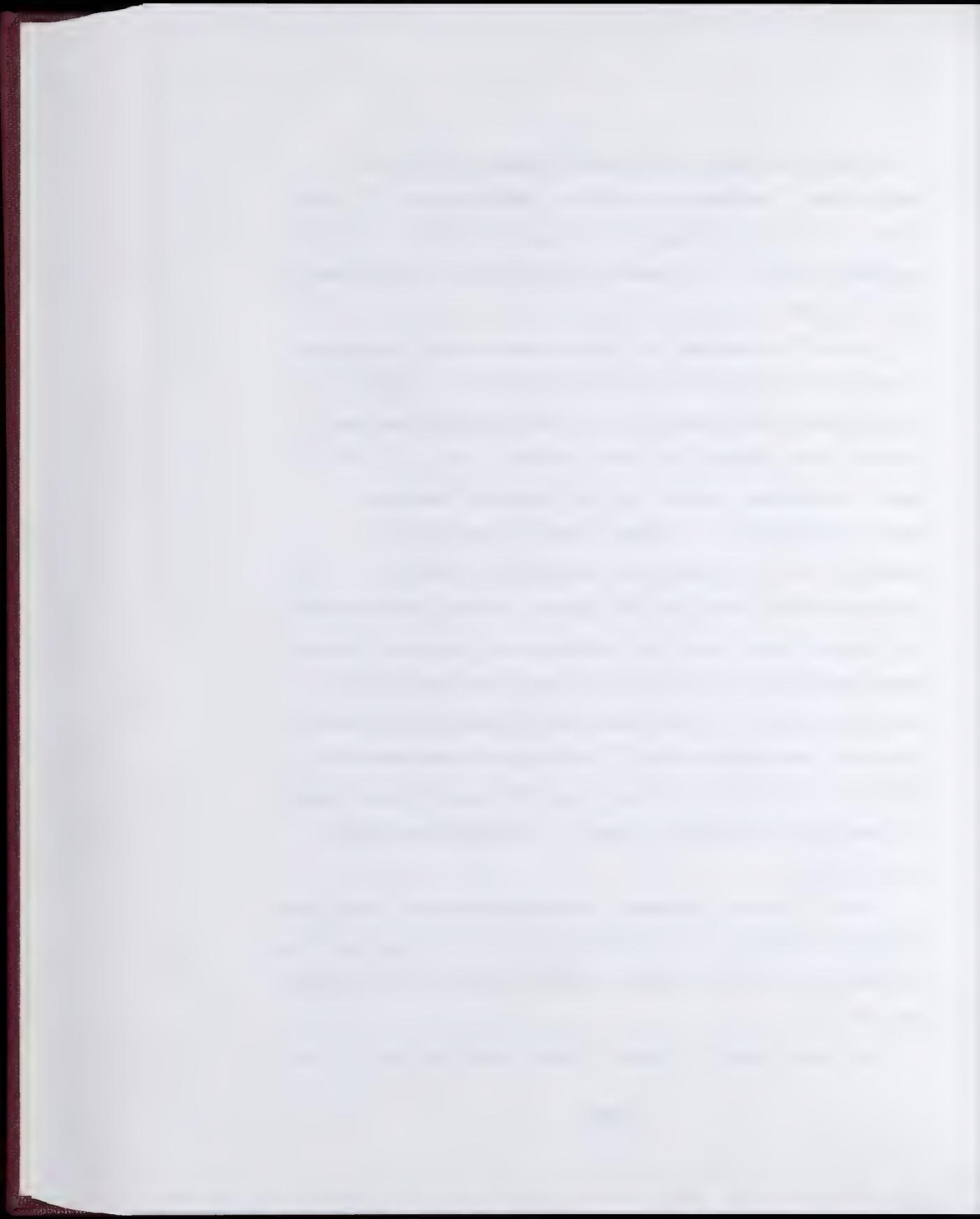


I've heard some disturbing rumors about strings and conditions." And Seymour began to waffle a bit. I said, "Look, it's going to come out sooner or later. What are we dealing with? As a member of the visiting committee, I think I ought to know what's going on."

And it turned out that there were so many different conditions, including some petty ones that indicated clearly what the intent of all these restrictions was. Because, for example, all the official stationery should read "the Sackler Museum and the Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University." Anyhow, Sackler came first. Secondly, all the labels had to contain a legend indicating that this was the Sackler Museum, which meant that people like Grenville Winthrop and Higginson and all these people who are giving all this great stuff worth much more than \$5 million were always going to be second fiddle to the Sackler name. Furthermore, whenever the object was lent or published, that the credit lines should all have this particular legend. And there were other restrictions.

Well, I said, "Seymour, this strikes me as being just the sort of thing we have always discussed in our meetings and the sort of thing that I wouldn't think that you would want to do."

He said, "Well, I know. I don't want to do it. But



it's the only way we're going to get the building. And because the university trustees won't raise a finger to help-- And as he is the only one that's going to give us enough so we can actually get started on the thing--" And so forth.

I said, "Well, suppose you wait a while. I mean, you've lived this way for a while. Why do you cave in to this kind of--? Blackmail is what it is, pure and simple."

There were other people involved, and of course they wanted it so badly and so on. But I said, "Okay. But I'm resigning from the visiting committee because I just don't want to be a party to this thing. I know this man. I know about him. This is the way he works, and he gets away with it because he's ruthless and he knows what the situation is. He's very smart and he knows he's got you over a barrel. He's going to make you pay for it. And I just don't think one ought to give in to that stuff if it's humanly possible to avoid it." So I did. Of course, he did the same thing down at the Smithsonian. And the reference to them [the Sackler Gallery], I mean, it comes before the Freer art gallery's. They have their own visiting committees and it's just--

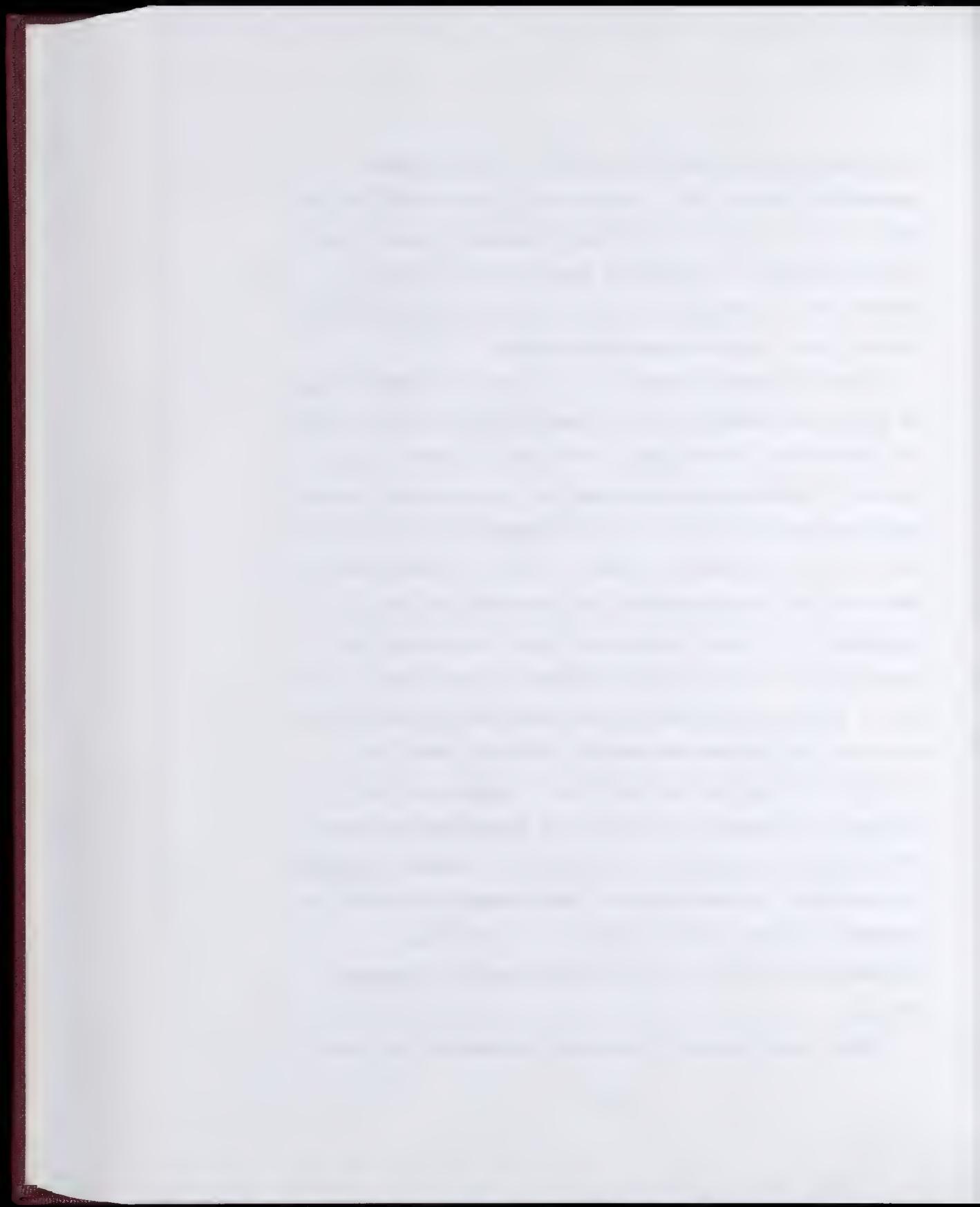
I just think I was just too fortunate and too lucky and brought up in Cleveland, where philanthropy was



philanthropy and people gave things. For instance, Leonard [C.] Hanna [Jr.] categorically refused to let his name be used on the wing [of the Cleveland Museum of Art] that he funded. And this has been true in a lot of places. But increasingly, you have had in museums this kind of what I call a form of blackmail.

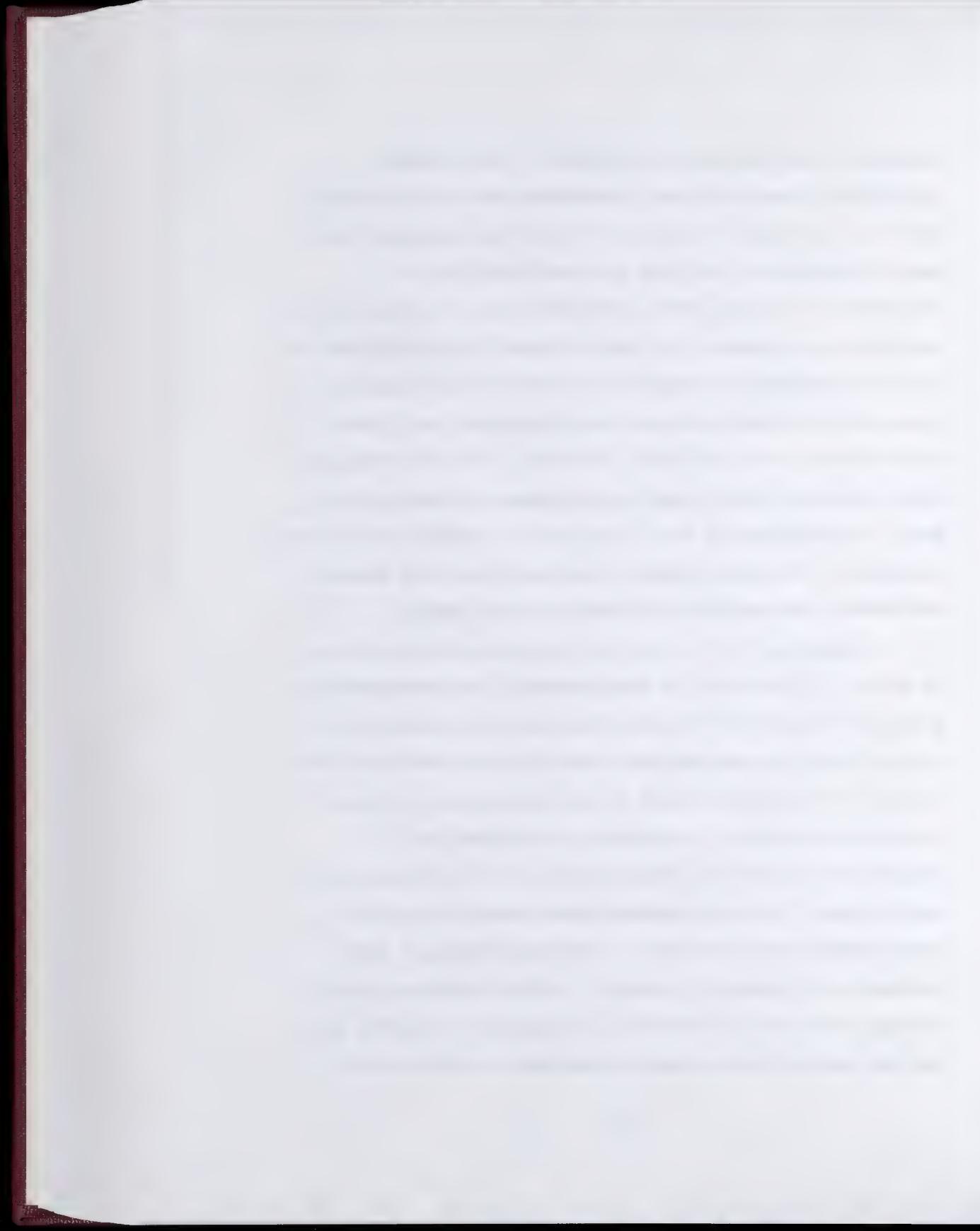
Bobby [Robert] Lehman, and the Lehman trustees after he died, were shopping around desperately to try to place the collection. Boston they tried and so forth. Then finally, the Metropolitan agreed to their demands, which were that the collection be kept together--well, at least for twenty-five years, so that it wasn't forever that it had to be all kept together--but also that it had to be displayed in a manner comparable to and recalling the installation in Mr. Lehman's apartment, including-- They put in a false staircase because there was a staircase in a room in the Lehman apartments. And then when the Linskys [Jack and Belle] made their bequests to the Metropolitan Museum, they agreed to something far worse. They agreed to keep it all together in a manner comparable to the way it was exhibited in the Linskys' apartment in perpetuity. They had to stick it in with other collections, but it had to be maintained as a separate entity.

They made a point in the case of some of the older



bequests, like the Altman Collection, the Friedsam Collection-- What had been bequeathed back before World War I or just after World War I-- Not too long ago they went to the courts and they got what they call a "variance," I guess, which permitted them to integrate the Rogier van der Weyden, and the Friedsam Collection went in with the Flemish paintings instead of having a separate room and the Altman pictures were done that way. They also did that with the Bache pictures. But here they were doing it again, right away, in a museum so large and so good. As a matter of fact, they really should control the situation. The donor needed them more than they needed the donor. But you get nowhere with that today.

In general, that's the way things are done in terms of gifts. In the case of many museums, the combination of greed on the part of the directors and the curators--I'm as used to it as anyone--the combination of that with the desires of the donors leads to the acceptance of large collections as gifts, which bring with them the responsibility for the conservation and the storage and maintenance. It's why museums have become so big and their budgets have swollen so much that they get even further into financial trouble. So this business of how to deal with the old tradition of bequests and gifts and the new desire to use them as leverage, as a means of



personal aggrandizement, fame, fortune, and so on, is I think a problem. It's not a major problem perhaps, but still I wish that there would be more people who would say just occasionally, "No, we are not going to accept that."

GARDNER: The next institution is the Amon Carter Museum [of Western Art], which you serve as a trustee for?

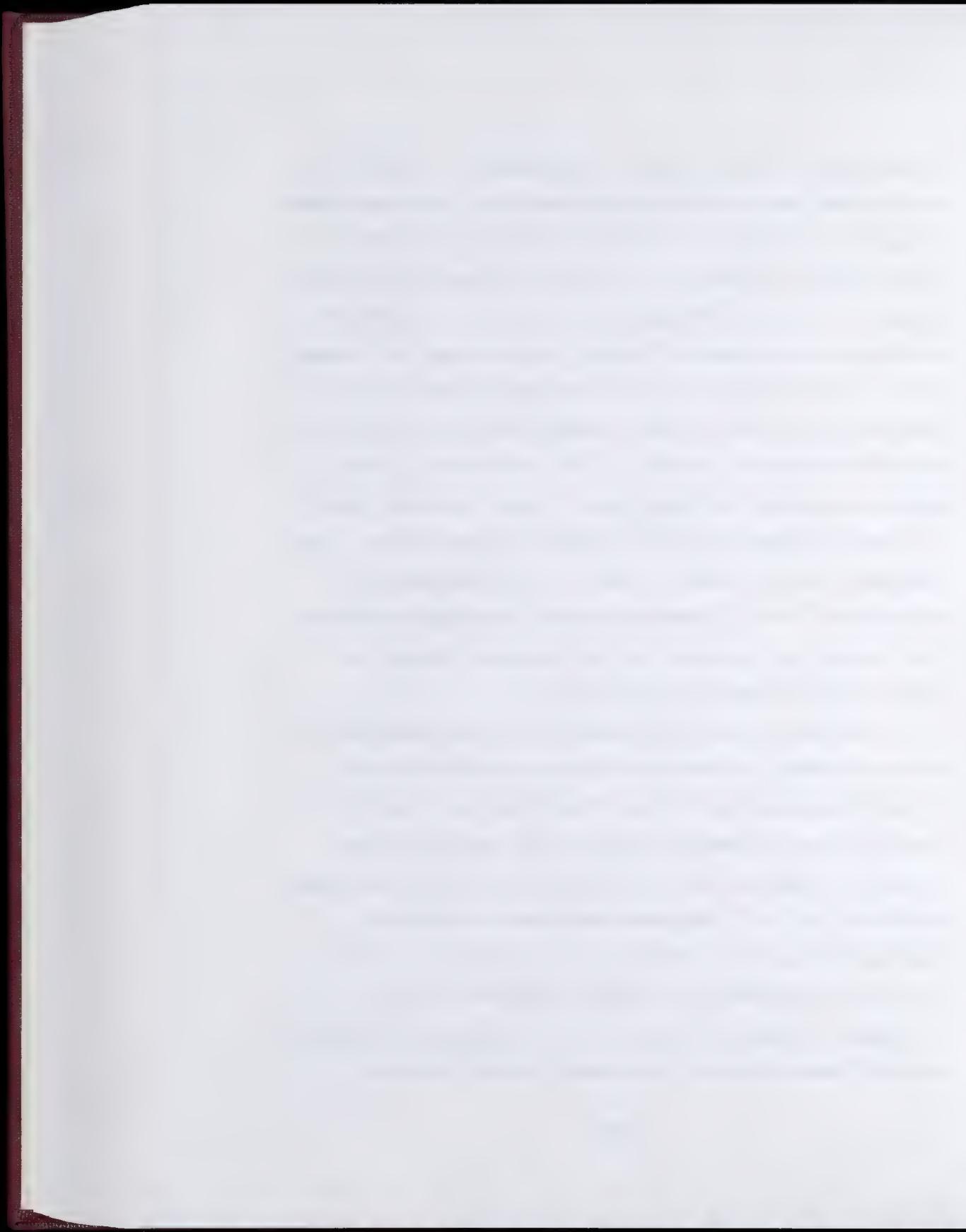
LEE: Yes. The Amon Carter Museum was founded, as you probably know, by Amon Carter as a museum of western art, the art of the American West, and was fundamentally that at its beginning: the Carter collection of works by Frederic Remington and Charlie [Charles M.] Russell. And this is an art form that I can take or leave alone very easily. But the tradition from the beginning at the Amon Carter Museum had been that there was a Ruth Carter [Stevenson], who was Amon Carter's daughter, who is the president of the board, and the museum is supported almost totally by the Amon Carter Foundation, which has also other responsibilities, hospitals and education and so on. So it's a very closely held private corporation.

Ruth Carter wanted it to develop into more. She felt that they needed in Texas something other than just works of the West. That there should be a good American art collection. So when they began, she wanted very much to have at least one, or perhaps more than one, professional museum person of some knowledge and some reputation to be



on the board so as to provide a professional point of view for a board that was basically laypersons. She has always an architect there on the board or a designer. And of course there are members of the Carter extended family and people of some significance and power in Fort Worth who could help the museum and so on. And Bartlett [H.] Hayes [Jr.], who was the director of the Addison Gallery of American Art at the Andover Academy, was I think the first museum-professional trustee of the Amon Carter. They asked me to go on the board, oh, it must have been about, I think, the early sixties, which I was happy to do. And then Bart was-- I think he died. And I was the only professional then. A few years ago, they appointed Evan [H.] Turner, my successor at the Cleveland [Museum of Art], so we're both on that board.

They have a beautiful building that was designed by Philip Johnson, and they have had one addition to it already, designed by Philip. They're going to have to have some more expansions fairly soon, and Philip has given his blessing, but he's not going to be the principal architect for it. They have developed a very good American collection. Small but very high quality. And they don't hesitate to pay what I consider to be outrageous prices for American art, including paintings by Church, Frederic Church, or Thomas Cole or [William]



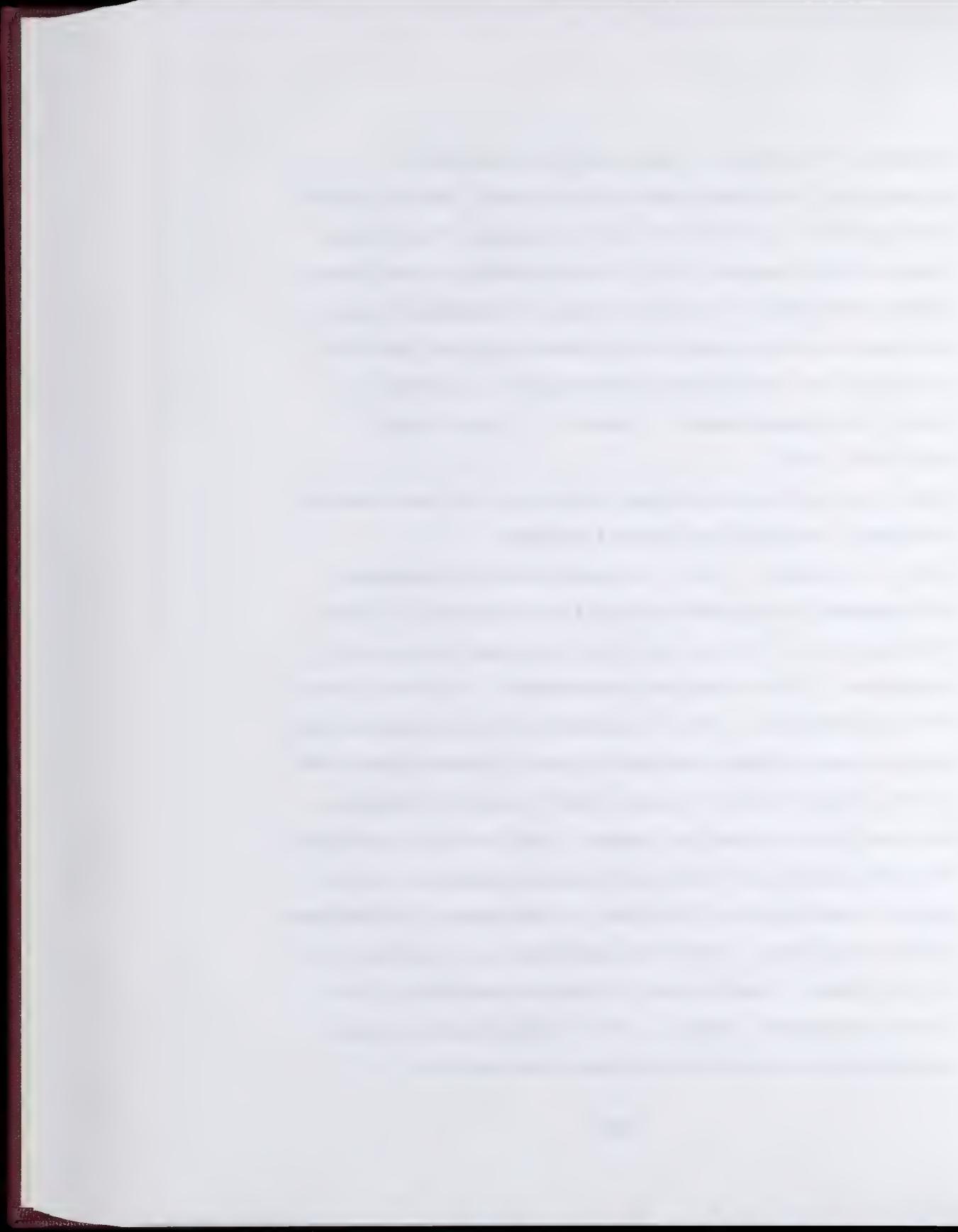
Harnett. You name it. But they have a wonderful collection. The board meets twice a year, usually annual meetings held in Fort Worth at the museum. They always have a second meeting, but it's often held at some other place where there's a major museum or something to see. And over the years, she really runs the place, and the director, who used to be in Cleveland, as a matter of fact-- God, these names! I know it, I just-- Ruth!

RUTH LEE: Yes.

LEE: What's the name of the director of the Amon Carter?

RUTH LEE: You mean Jan [Keene] Muhlert?

LEE: Jan Muhlert. Yes. She used to be at Cleveland. Her husband [Christopher Muhlert] is an artist. I know him quite well. She's very, very good and really well organized. It's a very well-run museum. But Ruth Carter, and now Stevenson-- She's married to the chairman of the board of the National Gallery [of Art] in Washington, who is Mr. [Paul] Mellon's lawyer, Jack [John R.] Stevenson. He's an international law lawyer. They really do get advice from the people and their professional expertise on the board: the architect, designer, or the museum professional. It's a very, very interesting operation and one which is so well done. They've made it into an absolutely first-class institution, doing a lot of work in publications, including good popular educational publications.



They have a huge photographic collection, which I have warned them about constantly for the last twenty years, and it's only now that they're beginning to find out that I wasn't all wrong. They've got over a half million negatives and images now, and they have to be kept at forty degrees. Other collections have to be kept at seventy-two. Humidity is a different requirement. And they're finding that this is a big, big problem. They're in it up to their necks, and some of them are beginning to think maybe photography is not the ultimate art form.

But it's one of the more interesting trustee things that can be done and well worth doing. It's nice that it's right next door to the Kimbell [Art] Museum, which is really, I think, an extraordinary development and wonderful collection and one that shows what can be done with money and knowledge and taste in a very short time.

GARDNER: The next that I have, and the last really, on my list of organizational endowments is NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities].

LEE: Well, the National Endowment for the Humanities, as you know, and the National Endowment for the Arts are creatures of congressional acts setting up the National [Foundation] on the Arts and Humanities. There's a council for the arts and there's a council--national council--for the humanities whose members are appointed by



the president of the United States and who serve for terms of six years. And along about-- When did [Richard M.] Nixon go out?

GARDNER: Nineteen seventy-four?

LEE: 'Seventy-four? Well, I think I was appointed by Mr. Nixon in 1973 or '72 to be on the National Council for the Humanities, whose chairman was Barnaby [C.] Keeney, formerly president of Brown [University].

GARDNER: I think so. Brown or Dartmouth [College], one of those. Brown, I think you're right.

LEE: Brown. And who had been appointed by [Lyndon B.] Johnson or [John F.] Kennedy, one or the other, whichever it was.

GARDNER: I think Johnson.

LEE: I think Johnson. And it had distinguished people on it. I remember particularly, for example, Hanna [Holborn] Gray, who was then president of the University of Chicago and later went on to be president at Yale, who's a very, very intelligent and distinguished person. Very impressive. Some of the other appointments of Mr. Nixon were Irving Kristol and Sidney Hook, both very conservative, as you know. And John Hollander, another conservative. The conductor of the Utah Symphony [Orchestra], [Maurice] Abravanel. There were professors from here and there, but it was humanities, not art. But



art was represented. They didn't make grants in the arts unless they felt it was related to the humanities.

Well, I don't know how my name got up to Mr. Nixon. I have no idea on that. But anyhow, when I walked into the first meeting of the National Endowment for the Humanities-- They were in a small room. They kept moving from sort of small quarters to small quarters around Washington and Foggy Bottom and other places. I remember I was looked upon with considerable suspicion and wariness because I'd been appointed by President Nixon. And I think they rather early on decided that I was not a conservative, that I was middle or to the left of the middle, and things warmed up.

There was a lot of work in connection with it in terms of reviewing of grant proposals, because we had to make recommendations to the chairman who made the grants. Barnaby Keeney, who was a very, very bright and a very sympathetic liberal person, was succeeded by a person I had no respect for, whose name was [Ronald S.] Berman, who was from University of California, San Diego. He belonged to the group including Kristol and Hook--a very neoconservative type. And also, I would say his attitude towards women was what I would describe as "semi-Neanderthal." That made life difficult, but with people like Hanna Gray and some others, we could manage to get



some things done. The staff was very good. Nancy Englander was on the staff at that time, and that's when I got to see her work. I think I got to know her. We had big policy discussions despite the fact that we could only recommend. I think the meetings, as I remember-- There were two days, and we went through an awful lot of stuff and we had a lot of homework to do beforehand. We were, each of us, sort of assigned to one of the review committees, and I was usually assigned to either the art history area or the museum grant area in order to just know what was going on in that area. And it was interesting and, again, very useful.

GARDNER: How long was the term?

LEE: Six years. And I wound up as the deputy chairman of the arts of the National Council for the Humanities. That was not Berman's doing, because the deputy chairman was selected by the members of the council. So I got to know the inner workings of government and I had to pay attention to a lot of things I might not normally have paid any attention to. Like most of these things, you find yourself learning more from the process and from them than they learn from you. That, I think, is all to the good. In connection with that, I think twice I was called upon, not as a member of the humanities council but as a member of the museum association [American Association of



Museums] and as the president of the board of the arts organization [American Arts Alliance], which I did towards the end of my career--I've testified before congress and once in connection with the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization] Convention on Cultural Property and once in connection with the reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Arts. And I got to know Sidney Yates a little bit, and I have a very high regard for him. I think without him in Congress that we would have been in more trouble much earlier than the endowment is now.

All that is part of what goes along with being a director of a major museum and also [with being] a person who finds it very difficult to say no to things that look kind of interesting but you don't quite realize how much time or how much energy they're going to take. But I don't regret it. I think I could have done without doing so much work for the American Association of Museums. But these other things have been, I think, very useful to all parties.

GARDNER: Let me ask you about your politics, because it's come up in this conversation about NEH. I would imagine, given the comments that you made all through, that you were perceived within the arts community as something of a conservative. How do you reconcile that with your



personal politics?

LEE: Well, I consider my personal politics to be somewhat conservative. I consider the policies of those who called themselves conservative to be reactionary. My reputation as a conservative basically comes I think more from my positions on the collecting, publication, and connoisseurship of contemporary art than from anything else. I'm a skeptic about the claims of a great many people in the field of contemporary art, and I believe in the marketplace for contemporary art to sort things out. I think many museums become much too involved in the right here and now thing and are used by both modern dealers and collectors as a means of aggrandizement for their cause. And that puts me definitely in the conservative camp. I've even said on numerous occasions that I thought there's nothing basically wrong with the old requirement at the National Gallery [of Art] in Washington that no work could enter the collection until the artist had been dead for fifty years. I think that's a little too strong, but the idea behind it and the intention is, I think, laudable.

On the other hand, in terms of education, in terms of popular education and in terms of what is now called "multiculturalism"-- And that is what I take originally to be an interest in the different cultures of the world, not only of the past but of the present, and a sympathetic



study of them, among other things, in order to find out if there are some things there that are worth emulating. And in that I would consider myself to be, not in the pejorative sense, a liberal. Basically, I have voted in the vast majority of times with the Democratic Party. And a few times, I have voted with Republicans in local cases where one knows the individual concern far better than one does in statewide or national-- But I would be hurt and offended if I were described socially and politically as a pure conservative, because I don't think it's true.

On the other hand, all my instincts are-- I found myself more deeply in sympathy with the Far Eastern philosophy and morality of Confucianism and with the Mediterranean philosophy of Stoicism than anything else. And both of those tend to make you-- And I'm not now speaking politically, I'm now speaking strictly from a social and intellectual point of view. Confucianism and Stoicism tend to make a conservative. That change just for the sake of change is not always wise. That you ought to look before you leap. That kind of philosophy, which I think was really middle of the road-- When one studies the Age of Enlightenment and one studies the founding fathers of the country, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, one is most aware of the middle path. I took a course in constitutional law in college, and I love



reading the opinions of the different majorities and minorities in the Supreme Court. I think that kind of conservatism has been the saving grace for humanity for several hundred years. I'm not easily persuaded that one should embrace the latest radical invention or the latest radical idea or organization simply because it represents something new and completely different.

GARDNER: Anything else on politics?

LEE: That's enough.

GARDNER: Okay. I have the three honors that you list on your résumé. Do you want to talk about them at all? Can I run through them quickly and you can tell me what they are and how you got them?

LEE: Uh-huh.

GARDNER: First of all, the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, which impresses me to no end.

LEE: Well, there's a certain amount of mystery in that. I cooperated with the French government in connection with an exhibition held in Paris in homage to one of the great art historians--and especially sinologists and art historians--of oriental art, René Grousset. They had an exhibition in commemoration of his activity after his death in Paris, and I think I wrote a few catalog entries for them and we lent them some material for the exhibition. I just don't know how it happened to come



about or anything, but all of a sudden, there it was. And it was presented to me by the French consul general in Cleveland, at the home of Emery May Norweb, the president of the museum at that time.

GARDNER: It didn't help when you had your problems with Poussin?

LEE: I never mentioned it.

GARDNER: You didn't tell the French government, after all, you're a chevalier?

LEE: No. I never mentioned it. The only occasion in which it helped me that I know of was in parking, I think it was in Auxerre. We were going with a friend. Ruth was with me and we were with friends. I parked in one place and they parked next to me. And when I came up, there was a policeman there, and he took a look at my little ribbon in the buttonhole and he removed a ticket from my car but left a ticket on their car. [laughter] That's the only time that I know.

We had very good cooperation between the French and Cleveland and with me personally. On Treasures from Medieval France we had a wonderful co-spirit and active cooperation, and on other things that are in connection with oriental matters and so on. I've always had a great rapport with my friends in France at the Bibliothèque Nationale, at the Musée Guimet, at the Louvre, at [Musée



des Beaux-Arts] Dijon.

Oh, this should go in. The Cleveland Museum of Art had four of the pleurants, the alabaster marble pleurants, from the tombs of the dukes of Burgundy. Leonard Hanna had bought two of them back in the thirties, and William [M.] Milliken had bought two at the same time. They came from the [Clarence H.] MacKay collection in Long Island, and they have been out of France since the time of the French Revolution, which is when the tombs were damaged and despoiled. And then they were reconstituted, but these four figures were out. The French, the mayor of Dijon and the director of the museum in Dijon, who was named Pierre Quarré, had always been bedeviling William Milliken about returning them. Well, this was ancient history that goes back to the French Revolution, and William had no intention-- Finally, they simply said, "Well, would you please give us plaster casts so we could have empty places on the tombs filled?" They're masterworks by Claus Sluter and Claus de Werve made for the charterhouse of Dijon. And William would never-- He said, "They're too fragile. We can't do casts," and so forth. He would never, never do anything about it.

One of the first things I did when I became director, I told [Hubert] Landais, "You know, this is ridiculous. We'll make good casts, as accurate as we can in terms of



colors and everything else, of the four pleurants from the tomb, and I'll be happy to give them to them." And then I got a letter from Quarré saying he was overjoyed--and the mayor of Dijon--and that they would like to have us bring them and have a presentation ceremony at the museum in Dijon where the tombs were. We went there and there was a presentation ceremony. I gave a brief address in French, which I practiced for days beforehand, trying to get it all right. I had my French friends make sure that it was idiomatic. And we had the ceremony of the presentation. And Ruth was there, of course. Then we retired to the Faisan d'Or, which is a restaurant not far from the museum, where our host was the Comte de Vogue, who owns the-- I think it is the Romanée-Conti vineyards in Burgundy. And we had a meal that was an absolute killer. It had everything. And everybody was so looped and out of it by the time they finished, and the cognac and everything else-- It was just unbelievable. Now, I'm trying to remember whether that gift of the four pleurants may have been part of that reason why they-- I can't remember exactly. I'll have to check whether that happened before the presentation of the Légion d'Honneur or whether it happened afterwards. But it may well have had something to do with it.



GARDNER: Okay. I have time. You're also a member of the Order of the North Star of Sweden.

LEE: Yes. That's very simple, because the king of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, at the time I was in Cleveland, was a great collector of Chinese art. And I had two specific connections with him. I've met the king on several occasions at openings of exhibitions. I met him once in London at a dealer's. He was very tall. He was six feet seven or six feet eight. He was an avid tennis player. He played tennis until he was eighty-two or eighty-three. And I was a tennis player, and that helped pass the conversational time. But when they had an exhibition circulated by the International Exhibitions Foundation in Washington, which was run by the wife of John Pope, Annemarie Henle Pope-- They organized an exhibition which traveled to three places in the United States: Asia Society, Cleveland, and I think Boston. John Pope was in charge of the display at the Asia Society. Cleveland, I was responsible for the arrangements. And I forgot who the third person was. So that was one thing that I had done for and with the king.

The second thing was that I knew quite well Carl [A.] Nordenfalk, who was the director of the National Museum in Stockholm. When I was there, he asked me particularly to



come at a certain time because they were in the process of considering or buying a Vermeer, a soi-disant Vermeer from the Beit collection in Ireland, later famous for the theft of the other Vermeer from the Beit collection that happened some decades ago. Beit had two Vermeers, one which was good and one which was very iffy and chancy by reputation and by photographic appearance. But Nordenfalk asked me if I would come by when the king came over to look at it, because the king would have to get the dough out of the royal treasury, discuss it with him. So I said, "Fine. I'll be happy to." So I met Nordenfalk and the king in the gallery where they had the picture hung. It was all roped off so nobody could get in. So I studied the picture and discussed it with them and so forth. And they finally decided that it really wasn't worth the chance and they didn't get it. But those were the two things which probably led to that award.

I should mention that Sweden is the only one, but we were carefully informed by the Swedish consul general from Chicago at the presentation ceremony-- Which was also held at Mrs. Norweb's, because it's a diplomatic occasion and she had been all through the diplomatic business during her life, so she loved doing these things. But the Swedish consul general informed us very carefully, explicitly and at some length, that the award, the medals



which I have in my bureau, were not given. They were
lent. And that after my death, they had to be returned to
the government of Sweden.



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JULY 16, 1992

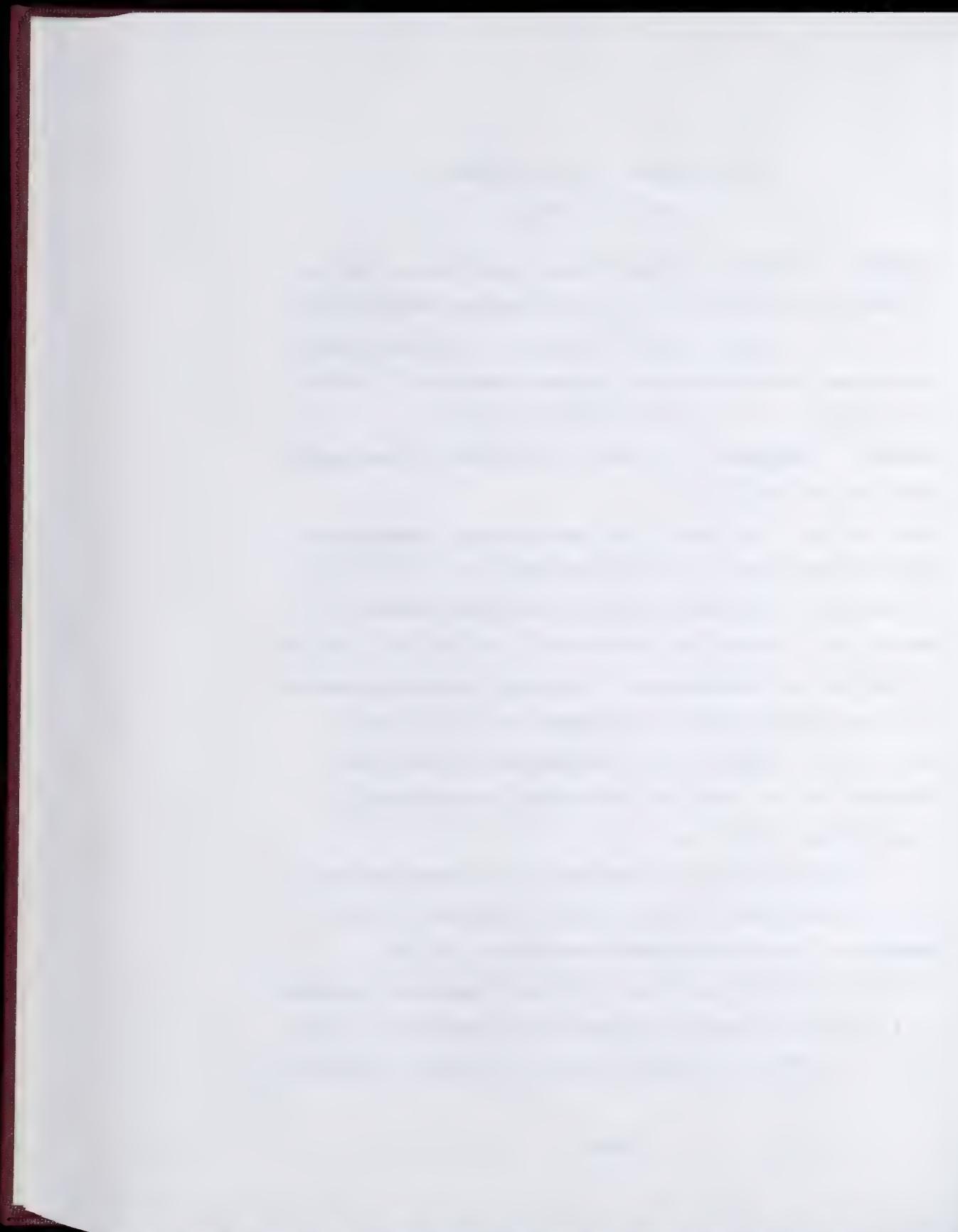
GARDNER: The third of these honors that I have, you're listed as the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Third Class.

LEE: Yes. I hasten to add--as my wife [Ruth Ward Lee] has always instructed me to do--that there are, I think, six classes, so it's not as bad as it sounds.

GARDNER: [laughter] You don't simply ride on the wooden seats on the railroad.

LEE: No, no. You know, I've been going to Japan every year for more than I think thirty years now, and I know the people I've worked with at the National Museum [of Modern Art]. During the occupation I was in charge of the protection and preservation of Japanese cultural property. I've been writing books on Japanese art. I've done a great deal in relation to my colleagues in Japan for Japanese art, in terms of exhibitions, publications, acquisitions, and so on.

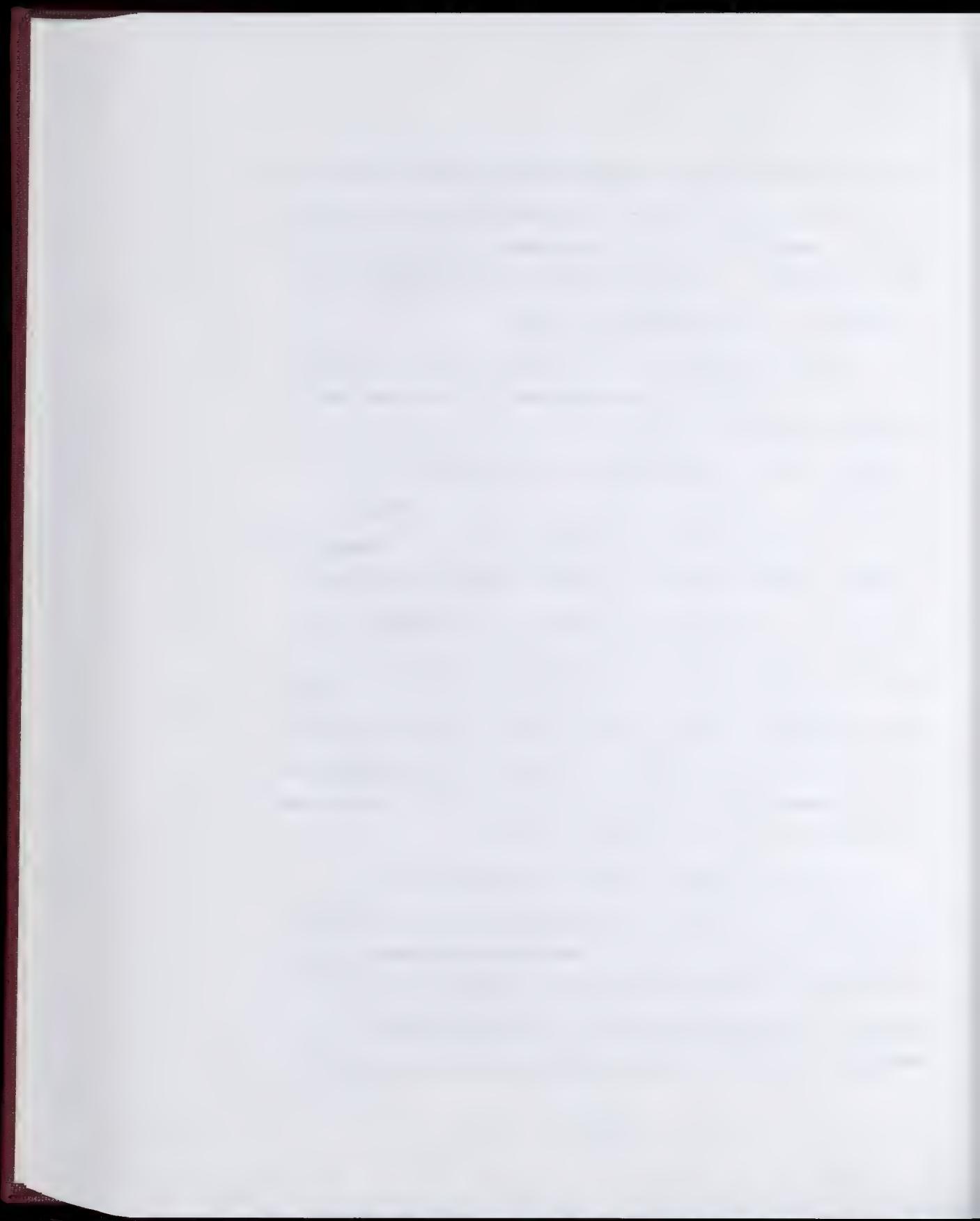
But the thing that triggered it was something that we have not mentioned and which I had forgotten. On the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the State Department asked me if I would take charge of organizing an exhibition to be held at the Tokyo National Museum and at Kyoto, to be lent



from the museums of the United States in honor of the 1776 celebration, and to make it a special occasion in Japan. I said I would do it and we went ahead. But I said, "What should we do?" I thought it would be taking coals to Newcastle to bring Japanese art over.

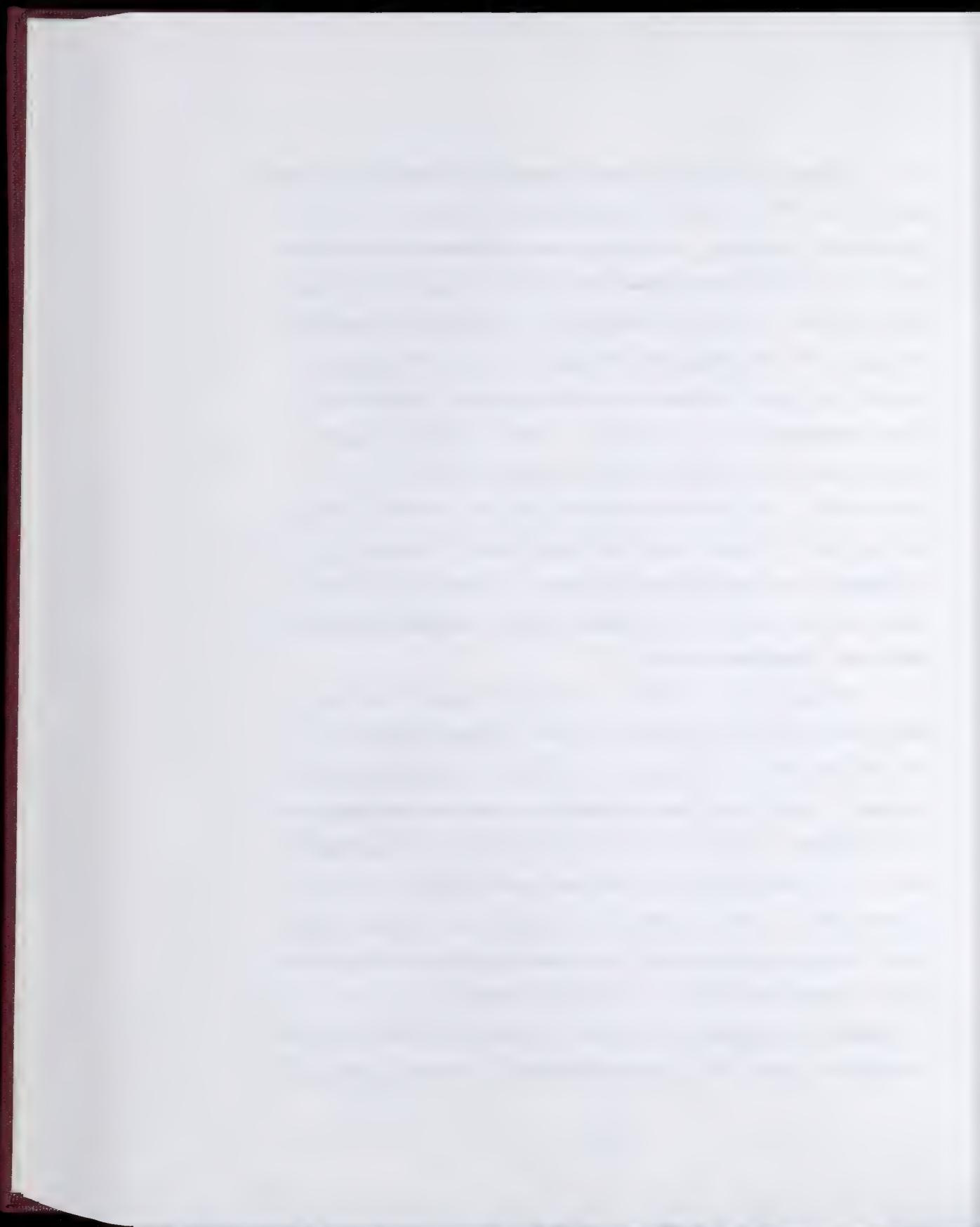
I began thinking, and it suddenly dawned on me that one of the things that I was supposed to do during the occupation and which I did try to do, as I hope I've explained, was to encourage what the occupation authorities called the "democratization" of museums in Japan. I had a personal interest. One of the things that is very striking when you go around museums around the world-- If you should go to Egypt, you see Egyptian art; in Italy, basically, you see Italian art; you go to Greece, you see Greek art. It's only in Germany, France, the [Museo del] Prado in Spain, and of course England and the Scandinavian countries and the United States where you go to a museum and you see the art of countries other than the one you're in. And Japanese museums--

One of the things I tried to do during the occupation-- It took a lot of talk and a lot of argument, but they finally did it. The Japanese had a very good collection of Cambodian and Southeast Asian art which I suspect had been acquired while they were occupying Southeast Asia, but there had been no hue and cry about



it. It wasn't displayed, and I argued for months with the people and the director of the National Museum. I knew the deputy director, who's the real professional director, who was a philosopher named Tanikawa. We got to be very good friends. He was a collector. He collected various things, including Egyptian things. I said, "You know, you've got some Chinese art on exhibition. You've got some Japanese art on exhibition. You've got this good collection of Cambodian art--you ought to put it on exhibition. You ought to broaden out so people in Japan get an idea of what other art looks like. It's so different from the things you have." Finally they did make, in the ground floor lobby area, a section where they had some Cambodian stuff.

That gave me the idea, when I was asked to do the show for the 1776 celebration, that I should have an exhibition where I selected from American museums the best things I could find that showed what American museums were like and what a culturally diverse society it represented and try to encourage the Japanese museum family and the public that it was worthwhile diversifying, trying to get more diverse collections. They were beginning to do it in the contemporary field, in buying Picasso, etc., etc. But in terms of the past traditions, it was not done, with one exception, which was a private museum, the Ohara Museum,



where Mr. Ohara had collected before, in the twenties, some old master paintings, including El Greco and Renoir and so forth. That was the only place, though, where you had that kind of a mix. And it was a private museum. So that's what I tried to do in the exhibition.

So we had French Gothic tapestries, we had Indian art, we had Cambodian art. We had what would be considered exotic from the standpoint of the United States, but to show the wide range and extent and depth of the cultural diversity that was represented in American museums. And it was well received. I think the Japanese came, and as they always do, they're much more interested in art than anyone else. They came and it was very successful.

The last day, when we were scheduled to leave and start home the next day, there was a frantic, urgent request from the cultural ministry, from the ministry of education. They had to get ahold of me. When they got ahold of me, they said, "You've got to come. You must be present at the ministry at such and such a time." I didn't know what the hell it was about. "And you have to be dressed rather formally." So I came and Ruth came with me and a friend of ours. We came to the ministry, and there we were informed that I was going to receive this order. I had to wait in the anteroom and then we were



ushered in. This is an order that is not personally bestowed by the emperor but is bestowed by the minister. And there I was presented with this award and a nice big medal for services to Japanese art and culture. I was informed after the ceremony by one of my friends that this had been very difficult and sorry it was such a rush, etc. But he said, "You realize that this award is usually given to people who are over seventy years old." And I was at that time, I think, probably around fifty or something like that.

So I think I understand fully the rationale behind their giving that particular honor. I understand the rationale behind the other two, but certainly I feel that the Japanese award was the least mysterious of the three.

GARDNER: Now, I'm going to return to some biographical things. Before I do that, I'd like to take a break.
[tape recorder off] What led you to choose Chapel Hill upon your retirement from Cleveland [Museum of Art]?

LEE: Well, a variety of factors. First and foremost, the idea was that one had to get out of town when one retires. I have no sympathy for chief executive officers of anything, whether it's a bank or a business or a museum, or for somebody who sticks around and inevitably, willy-nilly, whether he or she wants to or not, gets in the hair of their successor. It's inevitable because of their



connections, especially if they had been in the institution for a long time. So, one, we--Ruth and I-- fully agreed that we were going to get out of town. It took us a long time to convince the trustees that indeed we were retiring at age sixty-five and as scheduled. It wasn't until we bought this house two years before we retired that they really, really believed us. Secondly, we wanted to be someplace where there were seasons, but we wanted to be someplace that was temperate. Cleveland-- No one becomes director of the Cleveland Museum of Art because of the marvelous climate of the city. It's one of the two darkest places on the sun map of the United States. The other one is Seattle.

GARDNER: How about Buffalo?

LEE: Buffalo is part of the Cleveland center and Erie and Toledo to a certain extent. So we wanted to be someplace where it was temperate and lots of sunshine. We did not like Florida. We did not like California. Number three, Ruth's family and Ruth come from North Carolina, the western part of the state, and she knows the form and the people. And, four, we liked it because we knew Chapel Hill because all of our children were there when we bought the house--were in Chapel Hill or Raleigh--and all the grandchildren, six grandchildren. I liked the university and I liked the ambience. It's two and a half hours from



the sea and it's two and a half hours from the mountains. It's right in the middle. Also, we did not want to go to a large city or anything like that. We wanted lots of the peace, quiet, and tranquility--or what we thought was the peace, quiet, and tranquility--of a smaller town. So it was inevitable. It was the obvious choice, and that's why we did it.

GARDNER: How did the contact with UNC [University of North Carolina] and Duke [University] come about?

LEE: Well, I've been teaching since my early days. I didn't teach at a university when I was in Detroit, but from the time I was at Seattle on, I was always teaching at a university, in a university context. I liked teaching. I think it's good for the teacher and I hope it's good for the students. And I just asked if they were interested. They said, "Oh, absolutely," that they would like me to teach. And I asked at Duke, and I conceived the idea, in order to sort of spread the word on oriental art, that I would teach alternate years at UNC and at Duke in the spring semester--one course--because it was our custom to go to Japan in the fall.

I was particularly anxious to do it because there had been no courses given in oriental art at the University of North Carolina aside from-- It was part of a general course in religious art that had been given by one of the



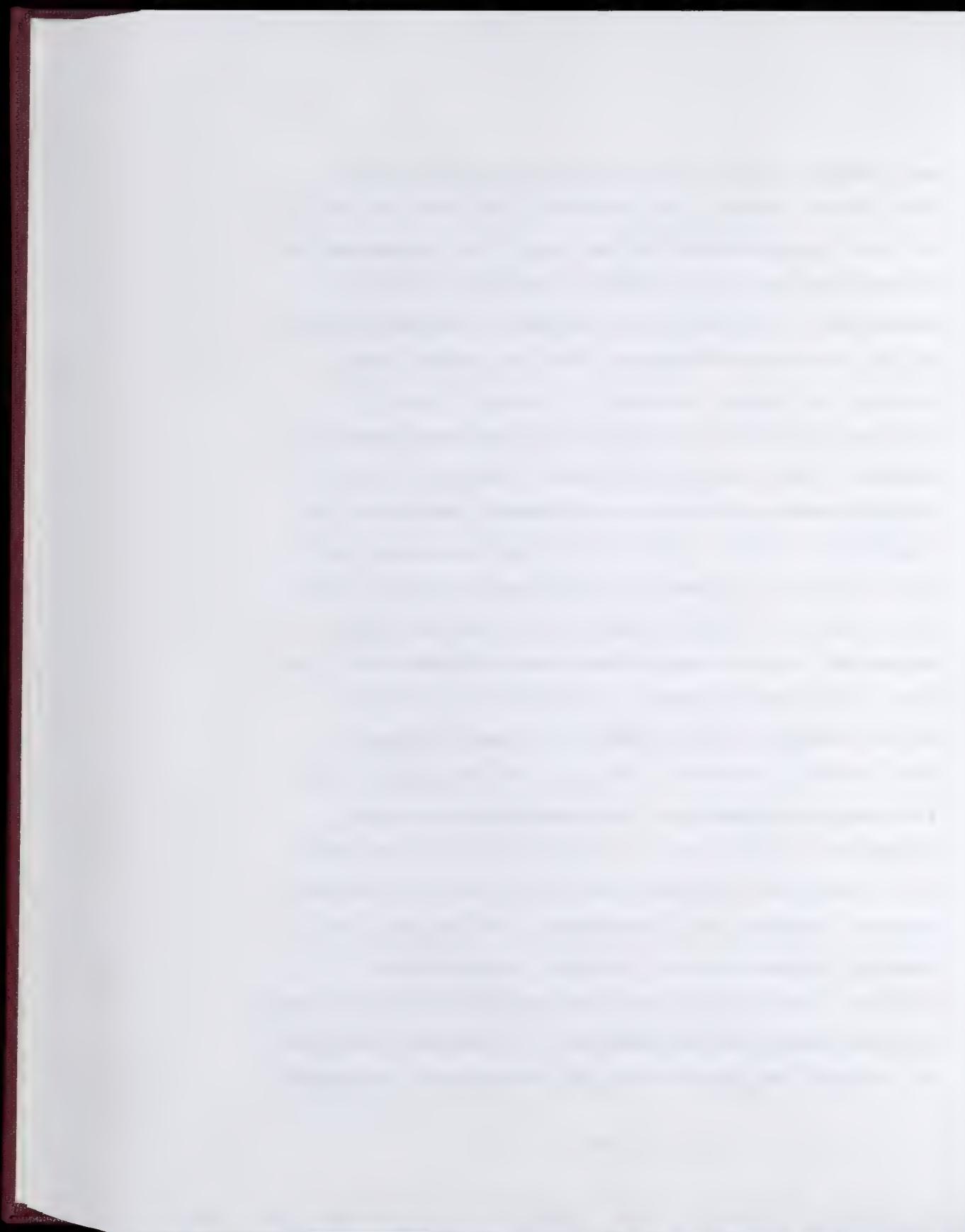
professors, who has retired. But not anything, just a segment of a course. At Duke they'd had a very good visiting professor for one year a few years before. Kidder. Professor [J. Edward] Kidder, whose specialty is early Japanese art. So they'd had no exposure, and I thought that it was an ideal situation in which to try to do some good. Also, there were no graduate programs in oriental art. Couldn't be. There were no professors, no courses given. And that appealed to me because I really like to teach young undergraduates. I think they're more sympathetic than a lot of graduate students.

So I've been doing it ever since in alternate years. And it's been I think, on the whole, successful. Several of the students have gone on. I've gotten postcards from Japan, a girl who's been studying there. One who is in China. And so on. There's been an impact on the student body, and I think that's good. And I've enjoyed doing it. GARDNER: You've mentioned that you had four children and six grandchildren here in 1983 when you moved. We haven't really picked up on your family since their origins in the, I guess, early forties and after. Could you give a rundown on your kids? What became of them and what they're all doing?

LEE: Well, our oldest daughter is Katharine [Lee Reid]. She took her A.B. at Vassar [College] and she went on to



get a master's at Harvard [University] in art history, doing Dutch painting. She studied at the École du Louvre in Paris on a Fulbright for one year. Then she became an intern under the Ford Foundation program at the Toledo Museum of Art and then became curator of the Smart Gallery at the University of Chicago. Then she became deputy director of the Art Institute of Chicago, a very responsible position which she was at for some years, and recently, last August, she was made director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, which is a very responsible position indeed with a very big museum and a big collection. And she's working hard at it and I think doing very well. She was married to a curator, John Keefe--who is now in New Orleans--and divorced after a few years. She has subsequently remarried an investment broker, semiretired, Bryan Reid, who was in Chicago. They're both in Richmond, Virginia, and doing very well. It's always a pleasure to have somebody go on in the museum world in the family. She calls me up quite often about this, that, and the other thing. And now that she's moved to Richmond, it's much easier. We can get up for openings up there and get together. So that's all terrific. When she was here, she was chief curator at the [William Hayes] Ackland [Memorial] Art [Center] under Evan [H.] Turner, who later became the director who followed me



at Cleveland.

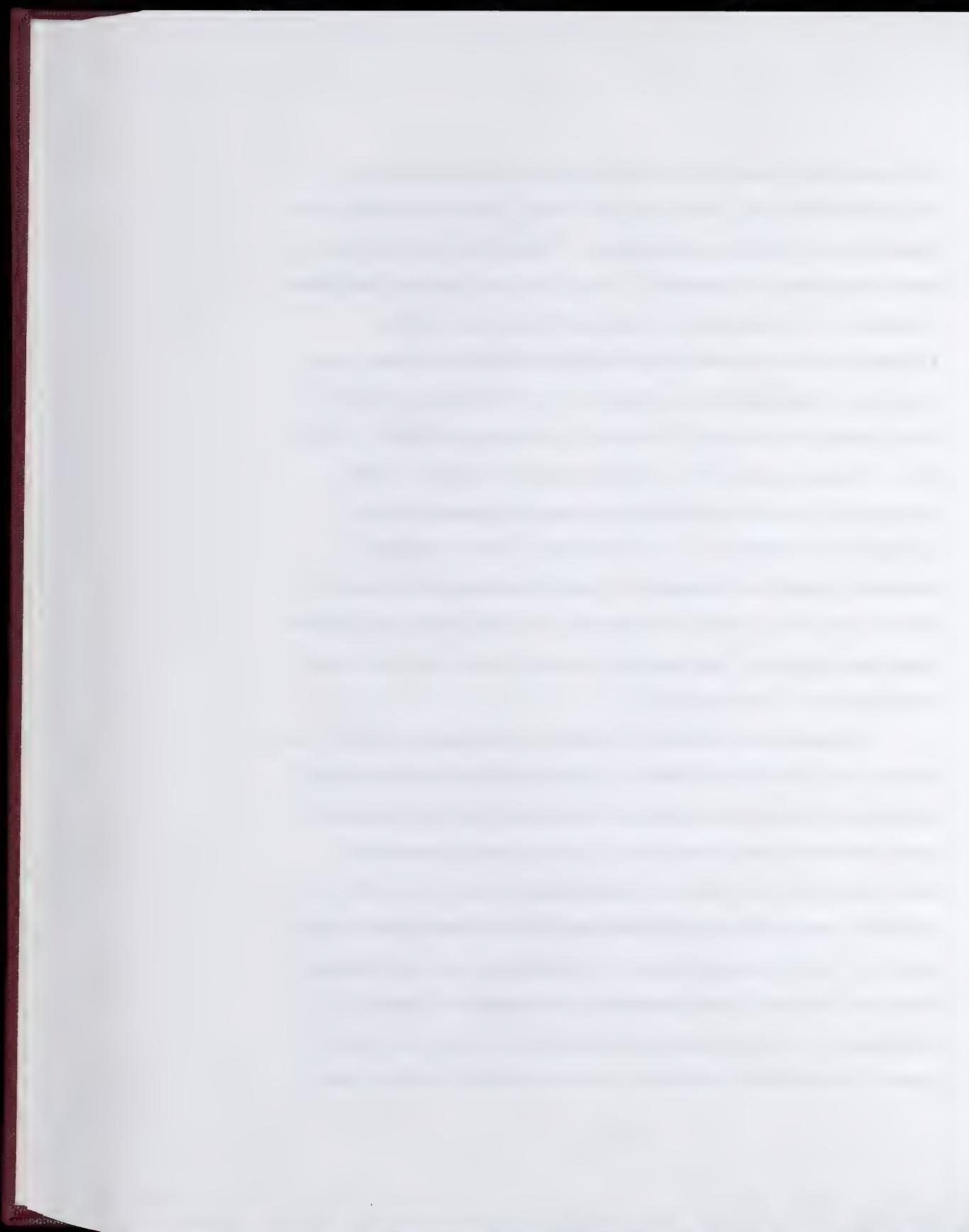
Our second daughter is Margaret [Lee Bachenheimer]. She got her A.B. from Smith [College], and she went on and took a master's degree at the Bank Street School of Education in New York. She has become a teacher specializing in first-, second-grade pupils, the ones I think are most interesting, and she likes it very much. She's been married and divorced and remarried. Her first husband was a psychologist, primarily child psychologist, Arne Gray. They moved, when she took her teaching position, to Chapel Hill. They've been at Chapel Hill for sixteen, seventeen years. They were divorced--mutual agreement--a few years ago. She remarried a professor, Dr. Stephen Bachenheimer, whose specialty is virology, viruses and so on. He teaches and does research at the university in the medical department at UNC. They're interested in art, but they're not devotees, shall we say. Katharine has no children. Margaret has two children by her first husband, Aaron Gray and Cecelia Gray. We see them all the time of course because they're right here.

Our third daughter is Elizabeth [Lee Chiego]. She went to Bradford [College], then to Boston University. Then she took her A.B. from Case Western Reserve University and she went into library science school before the school closed at Case Western Reserve. In the process



of doing that she met a graduate student and intern, William Chiego Jr., who got his Ph.D. in art history from Case Western Reserve University. They were married and went abroad and Elizabeth-- Well, he went abroad and then Elizabeth followed him abroad, and she went--like Katharine did--to the École du Louvre and got some good training there and some education in the realm of art. Then they got married at a civil ceremony in Paris, where the witnesses were Greta and Severance Millikin, the trustee of the Cleveland Museum and chairman of the accessions committee. And then there was a church ceremony which we attended at Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris later on, on the thirteenth of July--the day before quatorze juillet. We decided we had to get out of town that evening. We made it.

Elizabeth has worked in library work quite a bit, not always on a full-time basis. And Bill Chiego was chief curator at the North Carolina Museum of Art at Raleigh when we first came down here. There was a brouhaha involving the new director appointment and Bill had-- I think he was quite right that he had not been dealt with fairly. So he looked around for another job and became director of the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin [College]. He was there and they were there for seven years. Elizabeth worked in the library at Oberlin and



Bill was director in the museum. That of course is a wonderful college museum. And then he was offered the job of director of the [Marion Koogler] McNay [Art Institute] in San Antonio, Texas, which is a museum devoted to nineteenth- and twentieth-century art, and that's more or less his field. His doctoral dissertation was on the French romantic painter Horace Vernet. He's now director at the McNay. They've been there a little over a year, a year and a half. And they're doing very nicely.

They have two children, Ruth [Chiego] and Rose [Chiego]. Ruth is a great swimmer. She's won all kinds of medals both up in Cleveland, where she went to Laurel School, and down in San Antonio. She's a marvelous swimmer. And Rosie is-- She's a sort of budding thespian. She's very bright and very volatile, always thinking up odd things to do and perform or simulate. They keep life very, very busy for Bill and Elizabeth.

Our fourth child is Thomas [Lee]. Thomas took his A.B. in English literature at Kent State University and then married Christie Llewellyn and came down here. I'm trying to get this straight. But he decided that he didn't want to do anything in English literature. He was more interested in horticulture, so he took another degree at North Carolina State University here in horticulture and then became a horticulturalist at North Carolina State



University. Now he moved over a couple of years ago to Duke. They have two children, Annah [Lee] and then Sherman [Lee], who is now eight, and I guess Annah is ten or eleven. And they live in Raleigh. So it's very nice. We're going to the beach tomorrow, and the Chiegos are coming from San Antonio and the Reids are coming down from Richmond, and we'll have everyone together for at least a part of the week. And we've done that every year now for the last seven or eight years.

GARDNER: Terrific. Now that we've talked about your family, including one daughter in art and one son-in-law in art, what about protégés from the Cleveland Museum? You've talked a little bit now and again about people from the museum who went on to other jobs. Are there protégés of Sherman Lee spread throughout the country?

LEE: I don't know that I'd use the word "protégés," but there are quite a few people who have, in one way or another, been involved in the programs of the Cleveland Museum of Art either as full-time employees or as part of intern programs and so forth. I can just name a few off the top of my head. I mean, after all, Hubert Landais, the director of all the museums of France, was in our internship and museum study program for almost a year. Ted [Edmund P.] Pillsbury, the director of the Kimbell Art Museum, was a Ford Foundation intern at the Cleveland



Museum of Art. He's gone on to do that great job he's done down there. I think I've mentioned I've had graduate students like Tom [Thomas E.] Donaldson, who's a professor of Indian art and he took his doctorate under me; Kleinhenz, who did ceramics; and then Linda York Leach, who did Indian miniature painting and is now in England working for the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin; Bill [William D.] Wixom, who was curator of medieval and Renaissance art at the Cleveland Museum of Art for quite a few years, who did the Treasures from Medieval France exhibition. Bill was stolen away from us by the Metropolitan Museum of Art as director of the Cloisters and chief curator of medieval art at the museum. So he's moved onward and upward in a big way. Most of the curators stick around. Henry Hawley, our decorative arts curator in seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth century, is still at the museum. He's a very distinguished curator. He's done some very interesting publications, made some interesting discoveries in the field of eighteenth-century decorative arts and in the field of early twentieth-century decorative arts. Jack [John] Brown, our librarian until I retired--just after--is now the librarian at the Avery Library at the Art Institute of Chicago.

GARDNER: That's a good enough sampling. I mean, it's pretty impressive.



LEE: We've put people out and up. We had the Ford Foundation intern program at the museum, and I can't remember all the innovations. But Pillsbury is the most outstanding example of the production of that program.

And I guess that's about it.

GARDNER: Were you involved in the process of choosing Evan Turner as your successor?

LEE: I was involved in the process, yes. The answer is yes. I was asked by the trustees to submit names that I felt would be good replacements for the director--good candidates for the director's position. And I don't wish to be very specific, for obvious reasons, but I submitted five names. There were discussions--private discussions and that--but the basic formal meetings and discussions with the candidates were the business of the search committee, appointed by the trustees, and of the trustees themselves. I think that's appropriate.

GARDNER: Have you stayed in touch with the museum since your leaving?

LEE: Oh, yes. I'm going up to give a lecture in a colloquium involving imperial patrons of art in connection with the exhibition of the art of the Sun King, Amenhotep III of the eighteenth dynasty in Egypt. I'm doing that in September. I have, in the past, each year made trips to the Orient, where I have searched for and recommended to



the museum possible acquisitions. I can happily say that though not all of my recommendations were adopted, I think the most important ones were acquired, and they're, I think, a pretty wonderful bunch of things. And it's been interesting to do that. My successor as chief curator of oriental art is Michael Cunningham, who had his Ph.D. from University of Chicago under Harrie Vanderstappen. He is a specialist in Japanese art and has continued to develop the collections in general--Japanese art, but has also made a very definite and new effort to develop the collection of Korean art at the museum with a great degree of success. I have given other lectures there in the past eight years. I wrote the essay in their seventy-fifty anniversary publication about my particular period of directorship. I would say that I've maintained touch. I would say we have gone to Cleveland in the last eight years an average of maybe twice a year. We see old friends when we're there and I play golf up there with some friends. I've never played golf up there before. And occasionally at night I do some research in the library because the libraries here are not very good. And I go up especially for exhibitions that are of particular interest for me. We've maintained a cordial and friendly relationship.

GARDNER: The next thing and nearly the last thing I'm



going to ask you about is your own collecting.

LEE: May I interrupt?

GARDNER: Sure.

LEE: There are two things that we should have done or should do. One is relationship to the Ackland.

GARDNER: Okay.

LEE: I think we should do that. Another thing is we have said nothing about [Circa] 1492, have we?

GARDNER: No.

LEE: Should we go for 1492? [tape recorder off]

GARDNER: Let's start talking about your relationship with the Ackland.

LEE: Well, I knew the museum because, after all, my daughter Katharine was chief curator for several years. Evan Turner was there. We'd come down to Chapel Hill quite a bit to see the kids and so on, and we always saw the Ackland. I know the director before. The first director of the Ackland was Joe [Joseph C.] Sloane, who's still alive and lives up here at Carol Woods. And we see him reasonably often. So I've always known the museum as a small but very, very good university museum with its own endowment fund and with a steady income for acquisitions, which very few university museums have.

The North Carolina Museum of Art does not do anything with oriental art. I was asked by them to advise them,



conceive an exhibition and advise them on it, which I did, and I spent a lot of time and effort on it. I recommended a curator for the exhibition, who spent even more time on it. But that exhibition, which was going to be a very good one, has fallen through. The North Carolina Museum of Art is primarily an old master collection, which is very interesting, very good. I enjoy going to see it and it has some good modern paintings. But it basically is not so interesting to me.

The Ackland is a good university museum. It's right there with the art department. And the present director, Charles Millard, who succeeded Innis [H.] Shoemaker, who was briefly director-- She was curator of prints and drawings. But she didn't like being director. She's now up in Philadelphia [Philadelphia Museum of Art] as curator of prints and drawings with a wonderful collection. And then Charles Millard came. He was chief curator of the Hirshhorn Museum and he's now director of the Ackland. He's very sympathetic. He knows what he's doing. He's a thorough professional.

He suggested that it might be useful to try and develop some oriental art, and I didn't contest this suggestion at all. I thought it was a very good idea and I'd be happy to help them out within a much more obviously limited budget and limited scope than the kind of thing



that went on at Cleveland and Seattle [Art Museum]. We have, in the last three or four years, developed it. And also, there's a local couple, the Yagers, who are interested in Indian art and have bought and given some very, very nice Indian miniatures and sculpture, so that there's a really reasonable representation of Indian and Southeast Asian art. Charles is an indefatigable searcher for donors. We found a very nice lady [Lena Stewart Brillhouse] who was in the foreign service and who collected Southeast Asian ceramics who lives down in Southern Pines. She's given some very nice things to the museum. I bought stuff for the Ackland in Japan and in Hong Kong. And we now have enough Chinese, Japanese, and Indian and Southeast Asian material to fill two galleries twice a year, rotating, and including some really good things. At least I don't think there's anything that is terrible on exhibition, and there are some things that are good and there are some things that are very, very good. It's the only display of its kind between Richmond and Florida, as far as I know. And that's fun to do and I feel that it makes a contribution. I must say that when they opened the renovated galleries and the remodeled building, which took two and a half years to do, they had a wonderful turnout and a wonderful reaction on the part of the local populace. It's manageable enough, in terms



of what I have to do, that it doesn't become onerous, and I really enjoy doing it.

GARDNER: Now, the other thing that you'd wanted to talk about was Circa 1492. That's mea culpa, because it was on my list.

LEE: Well, you see, a lot of people seem to think that-- What are you doing down there? Chapel Hill, what--?"

GARDNER: Well, we know that you're playing golf every day.

LEE: "How do you spend your time?" Well, my average out I think on golf is probably maybe three to three and a half days a week, all year round. I play in the winter too. And we always play in the morning. We're finished by noon. So there's a half day left, plus the weekends. And there's a garden to take care of. My part of it, which is sort of manual labor-- My wife does all the smart stuff like the veggies and the flowers.

GARDNER: You move rocks.

LEE: I move rocks. And I repair fences. I dig holes and so forth. So people ask, "What do you do?" The answer is-- Well, I've told you I just finished the much revised and enlarged A History of Far Eastern Art, fifth edition, and I've written some articles. I'm working on an article now for a festschrift in honor of Alex [Alexander C.] Soper on a very interesting but very difficult subject.



It's not going to be terribly long, but it takes time.
And I help the Ackland Museum; I teach every year in the
spring. So I have a lot to occupy my time.

And then less than three years ago, I got a phone
call from the National Gallery [of Art] from [J.] Carter
Brown saying they were in desperate straits, that John
[M.] Rosenfield, who's a professor at Harvard, had decided
he couldn't continue in his capacity as guest curator for
the East Asian section of a major exhibition that was
going to be held on the five hundredth anniversary of
Columbus in 1492. It was called Circa 1492, and they
wanted to show what was going on around 1492 in the
places, as they put it, that Columbus came from, where he
got to, and where he thought he was going. Well, I
allowed at the very beginning that I thought that the
intellectual justification of the exhibition was a bit on
the thin side, but they persuaded me by saying what they
would do. It would also provide a nice series of trips to
the Orient to talk to my colleagues in Taiwan and to try
to, for the first time-- The thing that really intrigued
me the most about this, because this had the full backing
of the United States government--it was the National
Gallery--was to try and get the People's Republic of
China, museums there and the museums on Taipei, to exhibit
together in one venue. Never been done before. They



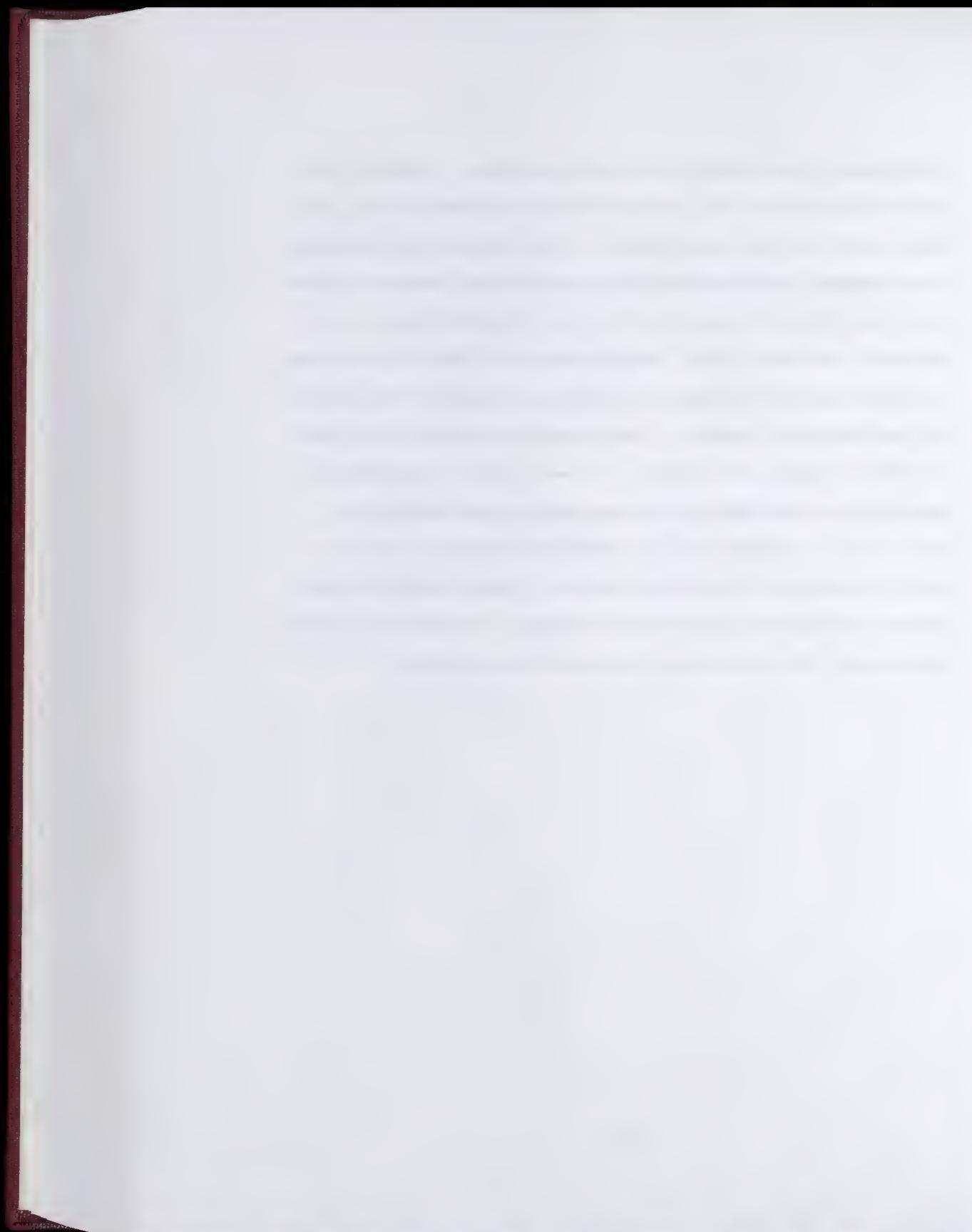
wouldn't do it, they never would.

I had previously worked with Howard Rogers on an exhibition, [Masterworks] of Ming and Ch'ing painting from the Forbidden City, which circulated around the country in the last two years. I wrote the introductory essay for the catalog, and I had just recently been in touch, therefore, with my colleagues in Shanghai and in Beijing. And I knew the people on Taiwan from previous occasions. I'd been a participant in the two symposia that were held in Taipei, one in nineteen sixty something and one in '72 or '73. So I said, "Okay. I'll do it."

Well, it was a real job. For a while I despaired. It was a real job, and writing the catalog entries and the essays for the catalog also took me a lot of time and energy. Now, I can't write beyond eleven thirty. I just can't. So I was up most every night to eleven thirty or so. But, by golly, we succeeded. We had a tough time with the Japanese, because there were conflicts involving Cleveland, especially on their seventy-fifth anniversary exhibition of Japanese art. I was not one hundred percent happy with the Japanese selection and performance. We first got Beijing to help. At first they were very much against it, but I had a couple of contacts in the ministry, and the people who were obstreperous at the [National] Palace Museum were basically people who were



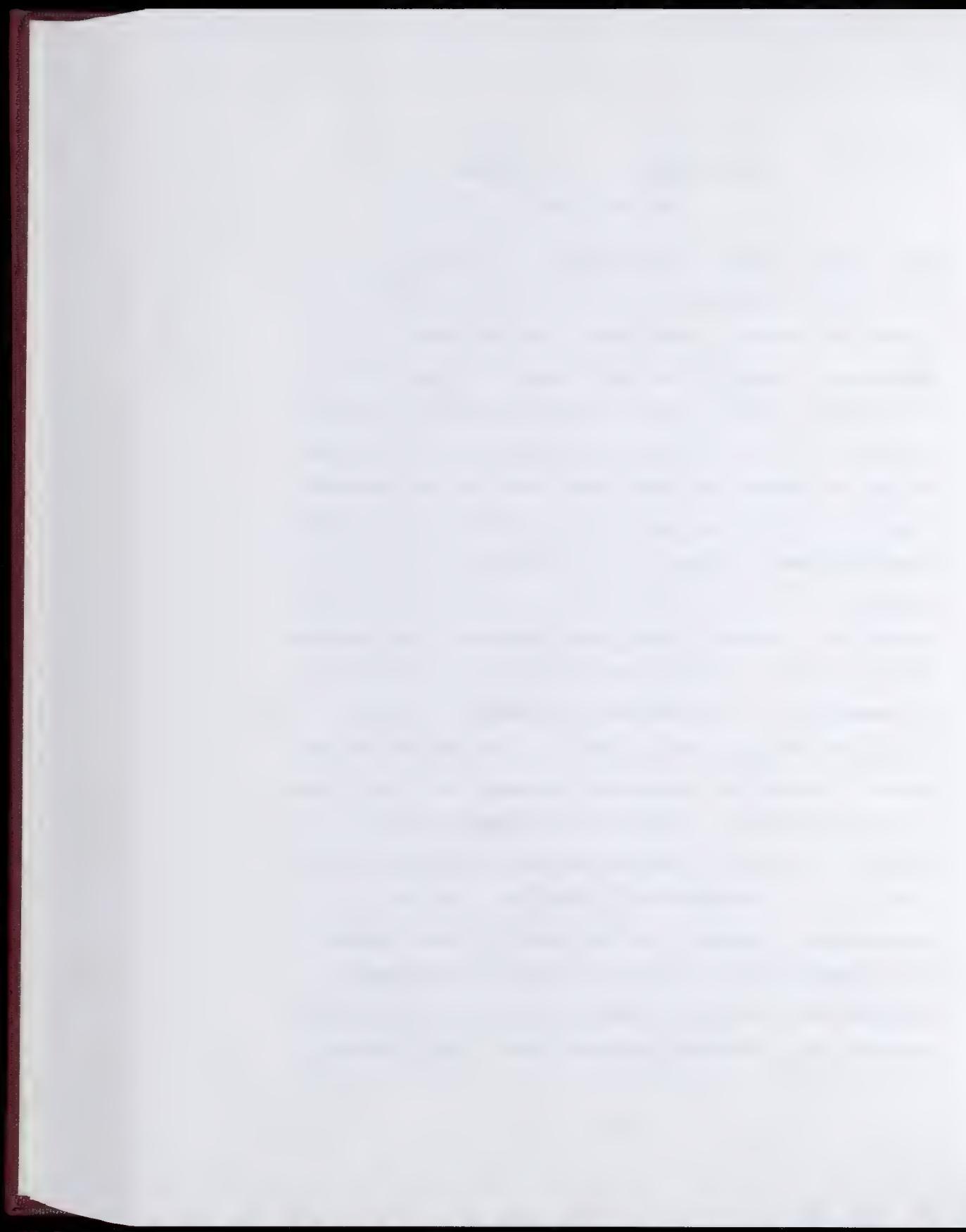
reactionary types after the unpleasantness. Anyhow, they said they would do it, and not only would they do it, but they would for the first time. I was able to get material from Shanghai and Nanching and a provincial museum to come with the Palace Museum material for the exhibition. It was very important, too, because we could get from Beijing conservative and academy and court paintings of the period of the fifteenth century. We picked the period from 1450 to 1550 as being the limits. We were able to get those conservative painters which are poorly represented in America or in Europe and in marvelous examples and in a kind of scale and size that you don't see, but which were common in imperial paintings in China. So this was a real eye-opener for everybody, including the scholars.



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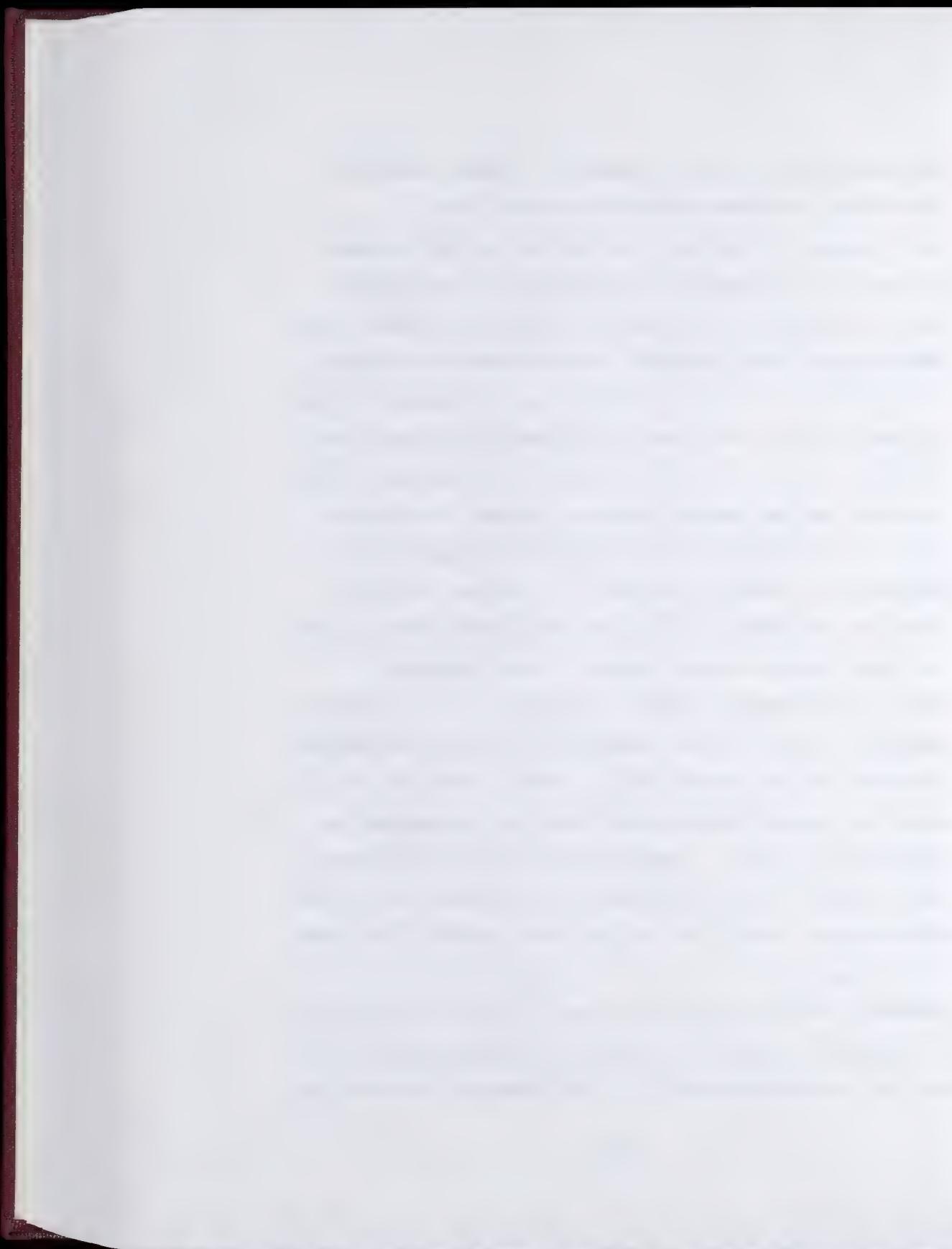
JULY 16, 1992

LEE: China, Korea, Japan, and India. India was difficult. I asked Cary Welch if he'd curate that particular section. There wasn't all that much happening in India at that particular time except the Muslims were running around breaking things up. But we persisted, and after we finished negotiations in Beijing, we went to Taipei. We told Taipei that the PRC [People's Republic of China] was going to send wonderful stuff from these different museums in China and wouldn't it be wonderful if they could participate too. They said they wanted to. I couldn't stop them; they would have given me the whole place. Because they wanted to, of course, try to compete with and outdo their colleagues in the PRC. So we calmed them down, but we got just what we wanted from there. The show was installed, as usual, on a very lavish and expensive basis by the museum designer [Gaylord Ravenal], who has his degree from the University of North Carolina. It was beautifully installed. And the installation, especially of the major official academic and professional paintings from Beijing--large-scale pictures--was just an eye-opener. It was wonderful and it received very favorable attention from a lot of people.



The exhibition as a whole, despite-- I still think the intellectual rationalization of the show, the justification of the show, was not one hundred percent. But they had the Woman with the Ermine by Leonardo [da Vinci] from Kracow. They had the Lisbon altarpiece [The Temptation of Saint Anthony] by Hieronymus Bosch, which I've never seen. Also, I'd never seen the Leonardo. They had some Gothic tapestries from cathedrals in Spain that nobody had seen. It was just a feast for the eye. It was terrific. My own feeling was that instead of trying to justify it intellectually, it should have been simply accepted as a feast for the eye. Of course, the only reason it was possible to do the Far Eastern section and the other things too was because it was a national, federal, governmental effort. That made a lot of things possible. So at the end, despite the size of the catalog, the weight of the catalog and all that, I felt it was well worth the rather frantic effort involved in meeting the deadlines and that. I was brought into the thing rather late in order to take John Rosenfield's place, and it was a horrendous effort. But it was worth it and it all came out all right.

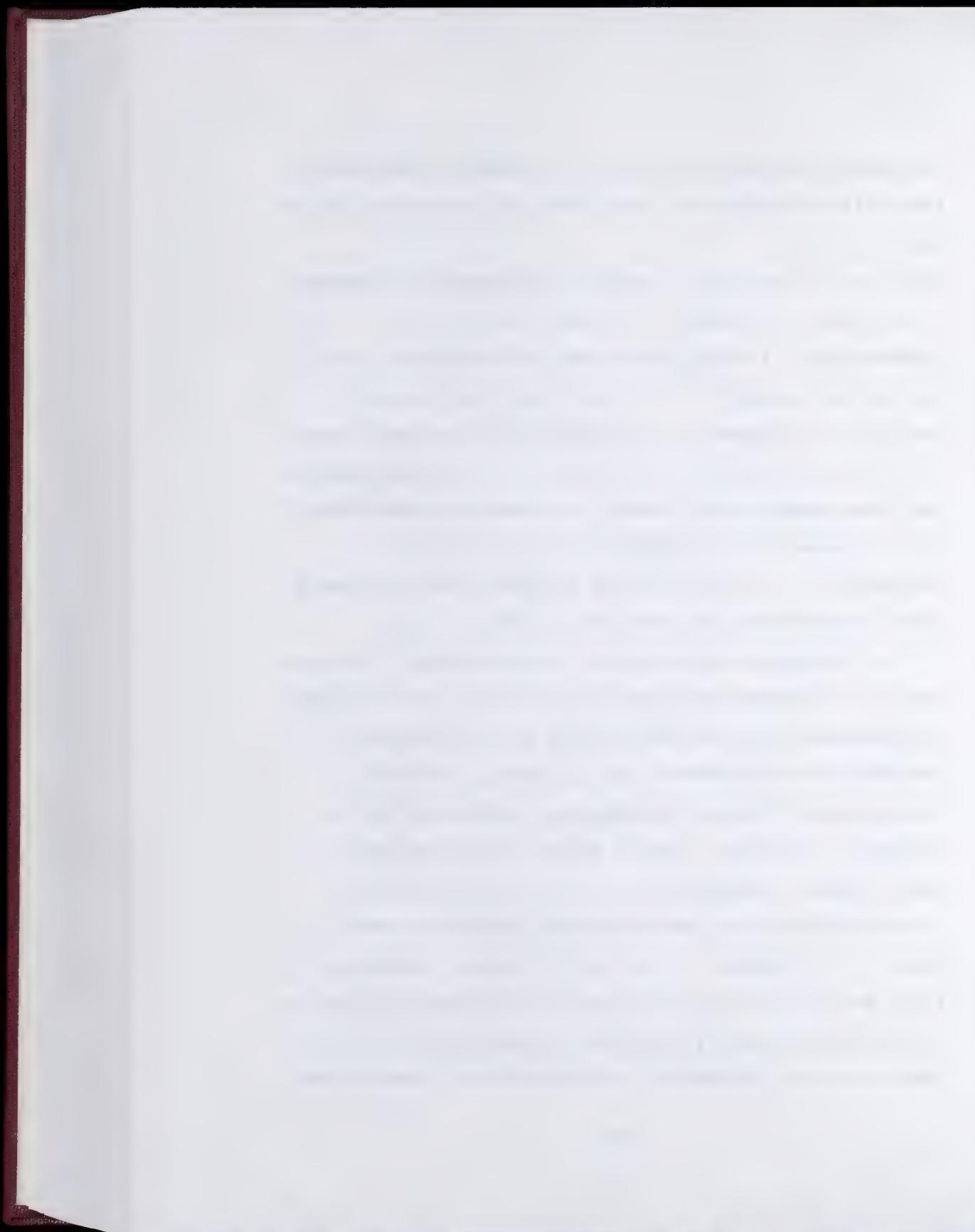
GARDNER: Okay. Now we get on, and I think this will be my last area to pursue. If there is anything you've left out, you can think about it. I'm interested in having you



talk about your own collecting: if there's a philosophy behind it, what sorts of things have you collected, and so on.

LEE: Well, first of all, you have to settle the problem of conflict of interest. It's not right for a professional-- I'm not talking now about trustees, but it applies to trustees too. I think that there can be conflicts of interest in the collecting of material that's of particular interest in the museum if a trustee steps in and takes something for himself because he has knowledge of it because of his museum connection. For a professional, it's particularly important that you have a clear understanding of what you're up to.

At the beginning, we didn't have any money. We had a couple of reproductions when we first set up our apartment in Washington after we were married in '38. We had a reproduction of El Greco's View of Toledo. We had a reproduction of Seurat's Grand jatte that is in the Art Institute of Chicago. We had several reproductions of Winslow Homer watercolors. I don't think we had any original works of art when we first-- We didn't have a penny to rub together. Then when I finally finished my Ph.D. and I got a job, our first child, Katharine, came in '41, which was three years after we were married. We bought a modern watercolor or something by a local artist



in Cleveland, Bill Sommers, but we still had the El Greco reproduction and so forth. And then during the war, we still didn't have any money. When I was a student, I was in New York and I think I told you I saw a Paul Klee for \$90 that is now in the Museum of Modern Art, a Rouault watercolor which was \$100 and is now in the Museum of Modern Art. I didn't have \$10 to spare. Some people say, "Oh, well, you could always borrow" and so forth. But that ain't my style. I don't like to owe anybody money. And I don't like to go beyond what I should be doing with regards to my family, my family's welfare.

But we went to Japan, of course, and things were very, very cheap and I started. I think the first thing I bought in Japan was that fragment of the Buddha image of the twelfth century up there. Wood. It's a fragment but it's got some style to it, and I think it cost something like \$15 or \$20, something like that. I was being paid what I considered a handsome salary by the government, with an "assimilated" rank of major, and we had a little extra money and I bought a few things. Then I was very much interested in Tz'u-chou ware. I started to collect Tz'u-chou. At the height of our collection, I think we had twenty-two or twenty-three pieces. I bought them from perfectly legitimate dealers in Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo.



On two occasions, there were pieces I bought that I was told by friends really ought to be in the National Museum, they'd like to have them. No, one the National Museum wanted, and one the Yamato Bunka-kan in Nara, [Yukio] Yashiro's museum, wanted. He wanted it. In each case I let them have it at the price I paid for it so there would be no question of my depleting the Japanese cultural heritage.

We bought a couple of small painting fragments, one of which is still here. I had it mounted. I bought others for the Seattle Art Museum. But that was the beginning of collecting, and it basically was simply a target of opportunity, being in Japan, having a little extra money, and also being unconnected with the museum but with responsibilities to the occupation and to the Japanese themselves. Then when we went back to Seattle, we had a family and I had to pay off a mortgage. We had to buy a house. I gave some of the Tz'u-chou ware to the Seattle Art Museum and took tax deductions. I sold a few pieces that Dick [Richard] Fuller wanted very much--a few pieces--and I let him have them at a reasonable price. And that helped in paying off the house business.

Then, when I moved to Cleveland, I was very careful. I didn't buy any oriental art because I felt that was-- I was chief curator before I became director. I've always



been interested in all kinds of art: European, even African art--I bought the first pieces of African art for the Seattle Art Museum--and also the art of the South Pacific. I've always been interested in these different things. I became interested in conservative, little-known painters, principally French and English, because that's when I had a little time in the evening or on Saturday to look around at some of the dealers. And also in old master drawings. But when I found a really good old master drawing that was, you know, a bargain, it went to the museum at that price. I found a superb Federico Barocci drawing in a bookstore in Milan, which I picked up. It's the final drawing study for the Aeneas Carrying Anchises from Troy. One of his great pictures. And I picked it up I think for \$300. It's now one of the stars of the museum collection. Yes, it was \$300.

And then, for example, in London I saw a little panel painting which I thought was marvelous, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. But it was, I think, \$800. And I bought that under hectic circumstances and took it home. Then we worked on it and it turned out it was indeed a very good painting. It was by Hans Holbein [the elder] and was the emblem of Erasmus, the Terminus in a round format. And we got the biggest expert on Holbein. He said it was Holbein--a man from the British Museum--and



he published it in our bulletin. We gave that to the museum in memory of Milton Fox, who had died just before. And I want to state that I took as a tax deduction \$800, although I could have taken a tax deduction of over \$100,000 without any problem. But I think I know what's really right and what's really wrong in these matters.

And that's how I dealt with that.

But, you know, you go around in the evening to little dealers or on the weekends. That big painting in there that you noticed, the Falls of Tivoli [by Robert Freebairn], that was a hundred bucks from Appleby. Today I think it's a modest, museum-quality picture. But back then, you know, we had Noah [L.] Butkin buying somewhat the same kinds of pictures, and he's given them to the museum. There was no real conflict of interest. One thing our curators all agree on, Bill Wixom and Henry Hawley-- We say quite frankly, "We're suspicious of curators or professors who say they can't collect or won't collect because it's in conflict with their profession." I think people who are based on books and photographs don't collect for probably a very good reason: they're not interested in original works of art. I think a curator and a museum director, who should be an art expert--a curatorial type as well-- I think it's unnatural if they don't collect. The main thing is, if they do



collect, the first rule of the game is that anything they have is available to the museum at cost price and, two, that they don't collect things that are in direct competition with the purchasing program of that museum.

In the old days, some of the museum directors who were wealthy men in their own right collected impressionist, postimpressionist for decoration in their homes and so on, and nobody thought anything about it. In recent years, you've had this sort of what I call "pseudomorality," where you have the idea that you should live like a monk in a cell and contemplate your books and photographs and that's quite enough, thank you. But I think it's natural--it's sort of like breathing--that you want to have original works of art around you.

When we first started we had reproductions. The idea of having a reproduction now, it doesn't appeal at all. I'd like to have things that show the things I love. The Indian style and small fragments of Indian sculpture--That stela over there of Shiva and Parvati from north central India around 900 A.D. is unsalable to a museum because the head of the principal figure is gone. But it's very good quality. It cost almost nothing and it's a pleasure to me.

We recently had--it was on our chest there--a fragment of Egyptian art, sculpture, of the chin and eye



parts of a portrait of Akhenaton, the famous so-called heretic king, one of the last kings of the eighteenth dynasty, which had been in the Amherst collection. Lord Amherst had picked up a lot of fragments from [Tel-el-] Amarna, and there it was. It was left to me by a friend of mine fifteen years ago. It was there, and I didn't know what I was going to do with it. I just loved it, but I knew that the Metropolitan Museum had--I've seen in their study gallery--a lot of fragments from Amarna from the Amherst collection. I looked at those things every now and then when I was in New York, and I think some looked as if they might belong.

So a couple of weeks ago when we went to New York together, Ruth and I went to the Met and talked to the curator [Dorothy Arnold]. She was very much interested. They got tables in the study gallery and we started matching. By golly, we found one match. Perfect match. And there are probably others, because a major part of the Amherst group of fragments from Amarna is in the British Museum. Mrs. Arnold is going to go to London soon and she's going to work on this, and I'll bet you they're going to find others. Well, we've given that thing to the Metropolitan because that's where the fragment is. They've got a great Egyptian department. They can pursue the thing, and perhaps they'll be able to get a major

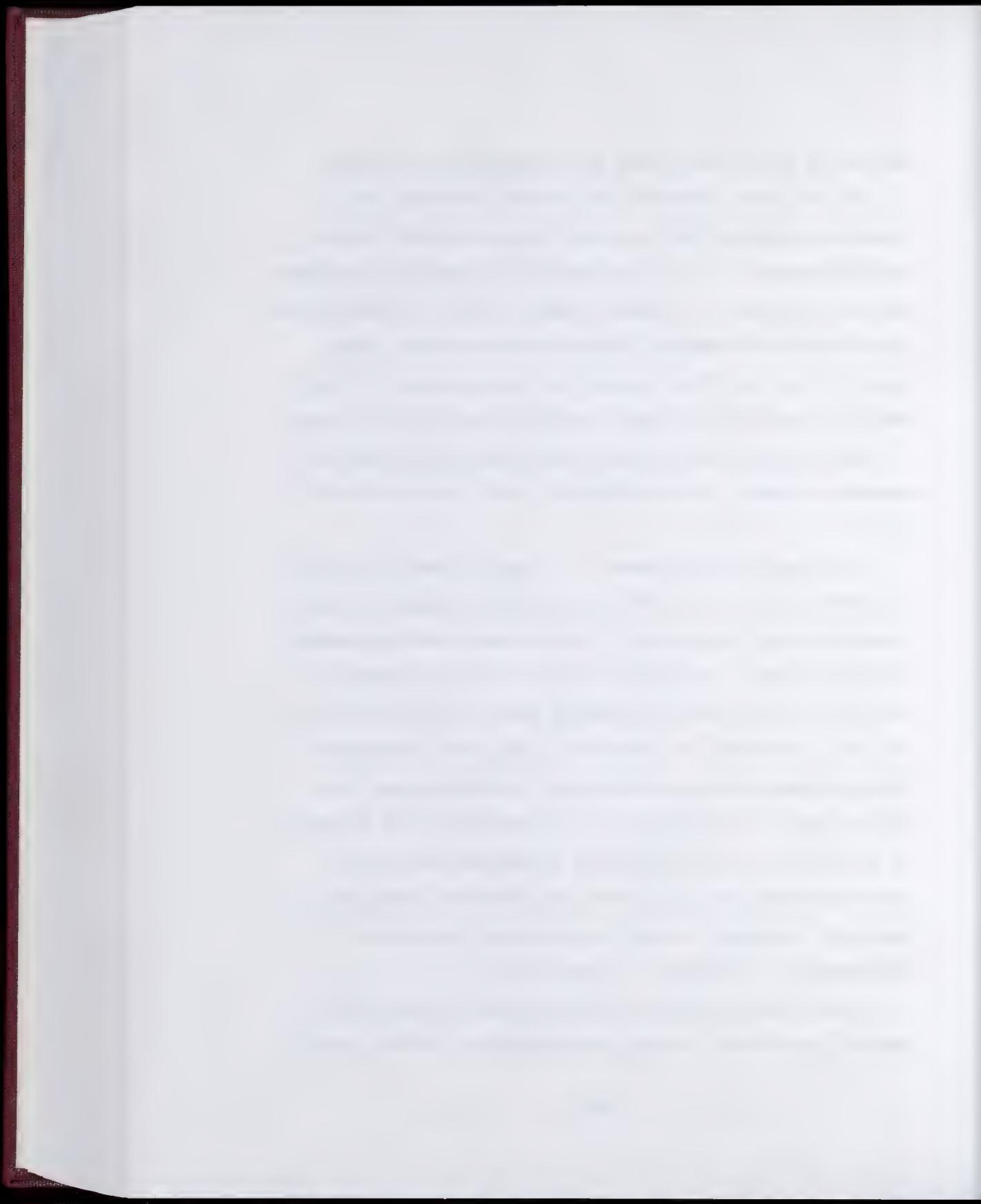


portion of a very large and significant royal portrait.

We've given things to the Ackland, Chinese and Japanese painting. We've given Cleveland small bronzes and plaquettes. I just gave them the three last good ones we have this year. So where things belong in a museum and where they are a quality that's for the museum, we've tried to see that there's been no interference. In the case of a secondary painter, nobody's heard of the names of these people, most of them, and some of them are not museum pictures. There are one or two I think are good enough.

But they also represent, in a sense, family-- What's the word I want to make it sound less mercenary? They're a family asset, family art. We've given lots of material to the children, including furniture and some pictures. I think that it's a kind of natural human kind of thing to do, and I, for one, would think it should be encouraged among professionals and curators. My role models, so-called, people like [William R.] Valentiner-- He exposed me to a very nice collection of German expressionist paintings--the people he knew. He had some older things, Rembrandt drawings, a small torso which is close to Michelangelo, in marble. He collected.

These are the things that are a part of our life. They're part of our living and breathing. And we enjoy



it. We've had a wonderful life. When we went to China-- Ruth's been three times; I've been five--we went to the official government shops where they have all the things marked with wax seals. They can be exported, no problem. And you find things. I mean, what I've found are quite a few nice fan paintings, these landscape stones, the so-called Ta-li marble stones. I've become interested in and somewhat knowledgeable about Tibetan and Nepalese art in the last ten years. And we picked up a couple of nice tankas from Spink's in London. It's just fun and it's the thing to do and it also-- And this is the hard reasoning about it in one of its aspects--

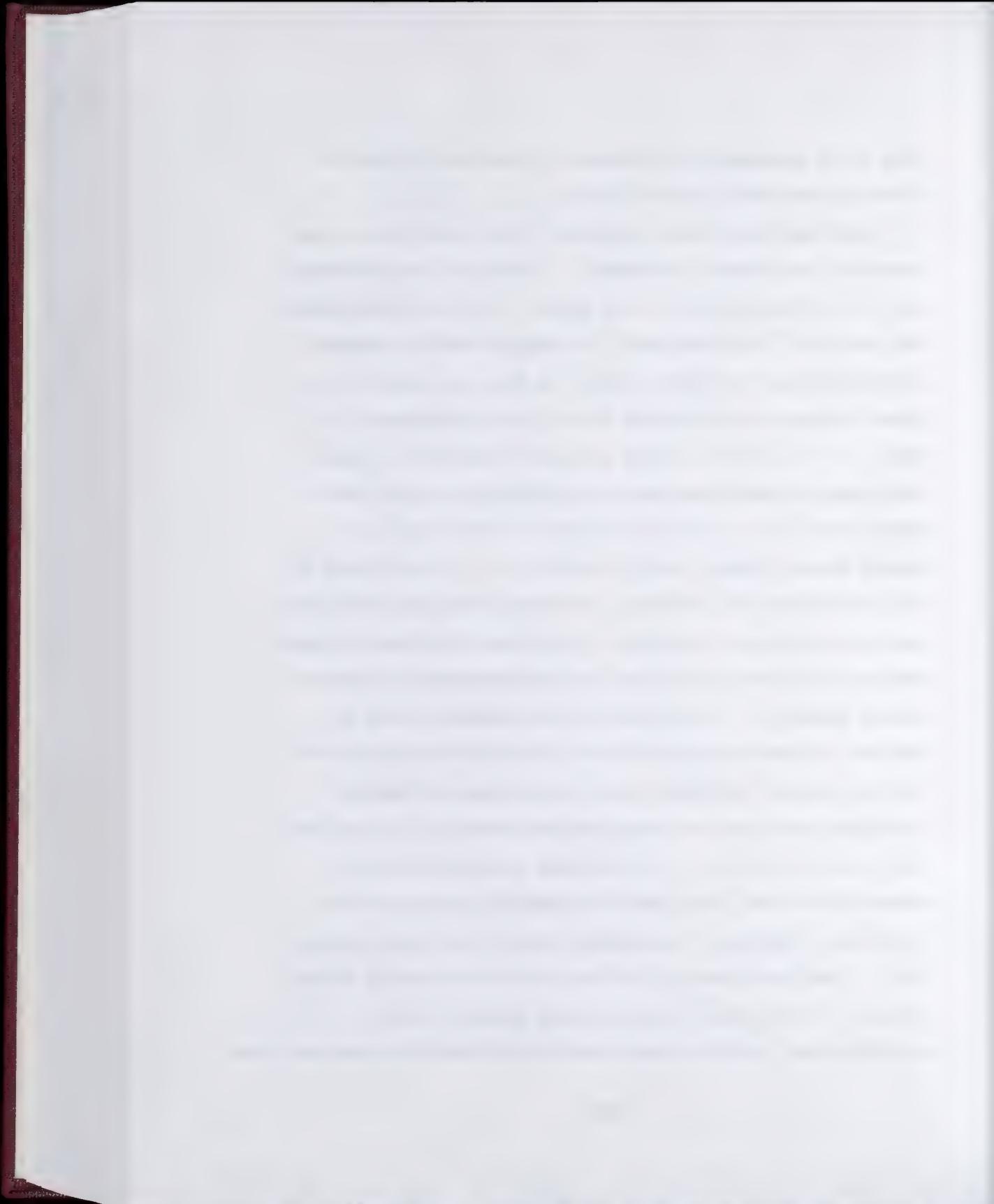
You know, everybody says you should have a nest egg and you should provide for the future--all those wonderful old homilies. Well, anytime that I have to choose between a work of art and a stock certificate or a portrait-of-Andrew-Jackson bill or you name it, I think works of art are far more interesting. You can hang them. They give you pleasure. And when push comes to shove, if you have to--you have a need to do something for a house, therefore a major expenditure--that's your bank account. It's available. We could afford to have bought this house from the proceeds of the sale of our house in Cleveland, but we couldn't afford to fix it up. We'd be living in a garage. So I think any good Stoic or any good Confucian would find



this a not unsympathetic argument. And that's been it.

We've enjoyed every minute of it.

Ruth has found some material. She found that large, wonderful burl there in Suchou. I told her they'd never get it to this country in one piece. She said they would, and they did. We love pots. We bought modern Japanese pottery instead of older stuff. We have not gone in for older things on the shelves there. And furniture-- You know, it kills me to go out and spend the kind of money they required back when we were getting furniture for a modern work, let's say a Mies van der Rohe chair or a Marcel Breuer chair. Well, first of all, I don't want to sit in them day in, day out. But also they cost more than good old pieces of furniture. And especially when we were getting furniture, we'd look for Empire material, because nobody wanted it. We thought it was wonderful and we thought it had a certain kind of architectural character that we liked. We bought very nice pieces of Empire furniture which we are using now and continue to use, and the kids all like it. It cost much less than buying modern furniture. So I think collecting is a habit but it's also a desire. Some people have it and some people don't. And some have it but use it for collecting other things: bottle caps or some people collect stock certificates. But we like works of art and so we collect them.



GARDNER: Well, that's the end of my list. Do you have anything you'd like to add to this twenty hours-plus of tape that we've collected?

LEE: No, my brain is numb by now.

GARDNER: I think that's probably the best line to end on.

LEE: Undoubtedly, we will think of something in the middle of the night or in the middle of next week. But if something really urgent occurs within the next few days or weeks, if you think of something or I think of something, we ought to let each other know what it is, and maybe we can work out some way to get it put in even if it's written out and then verbalized.

GARDNER: Okay. Well, I'm sure you'll think of more. You've had a full life.



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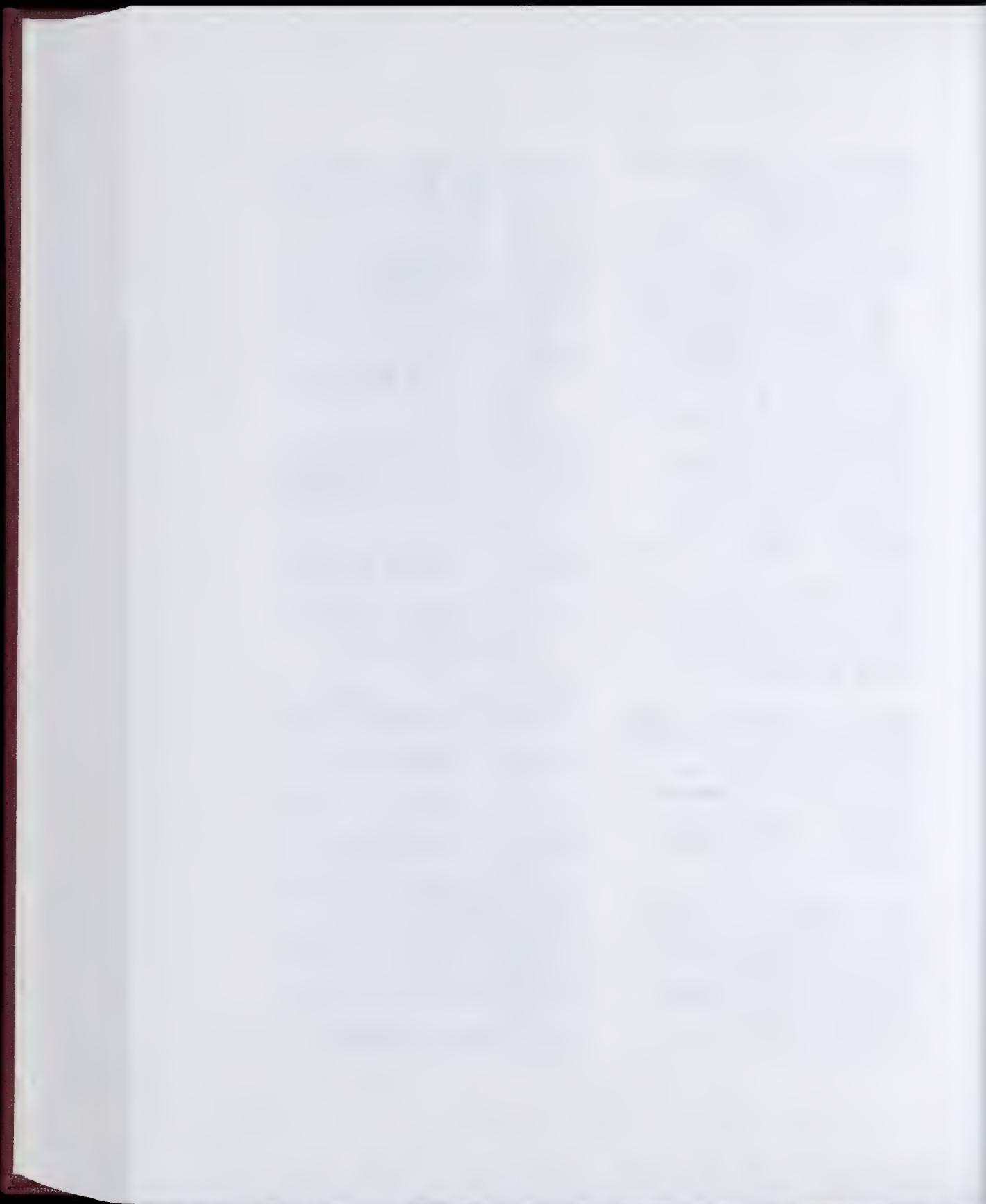
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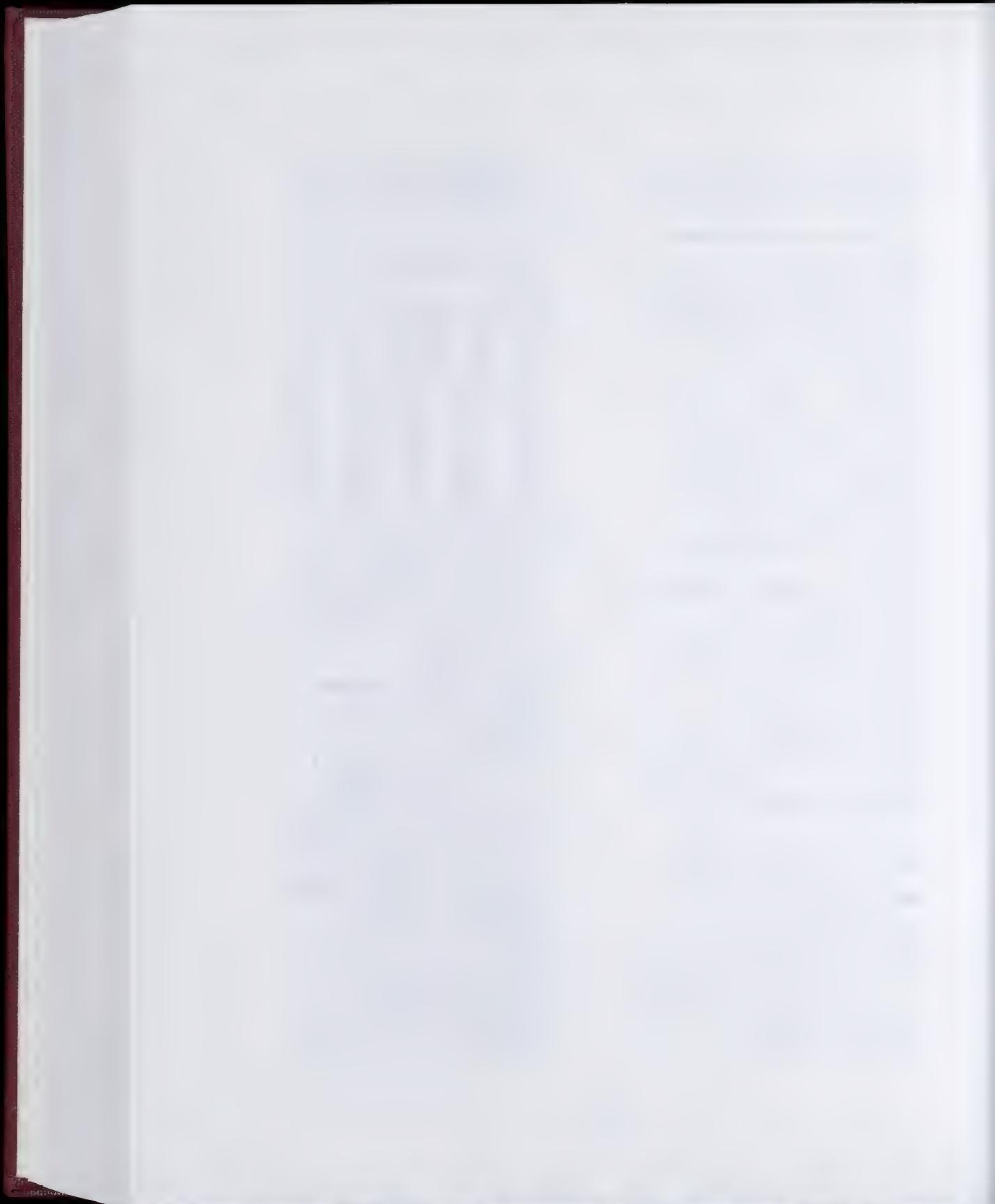


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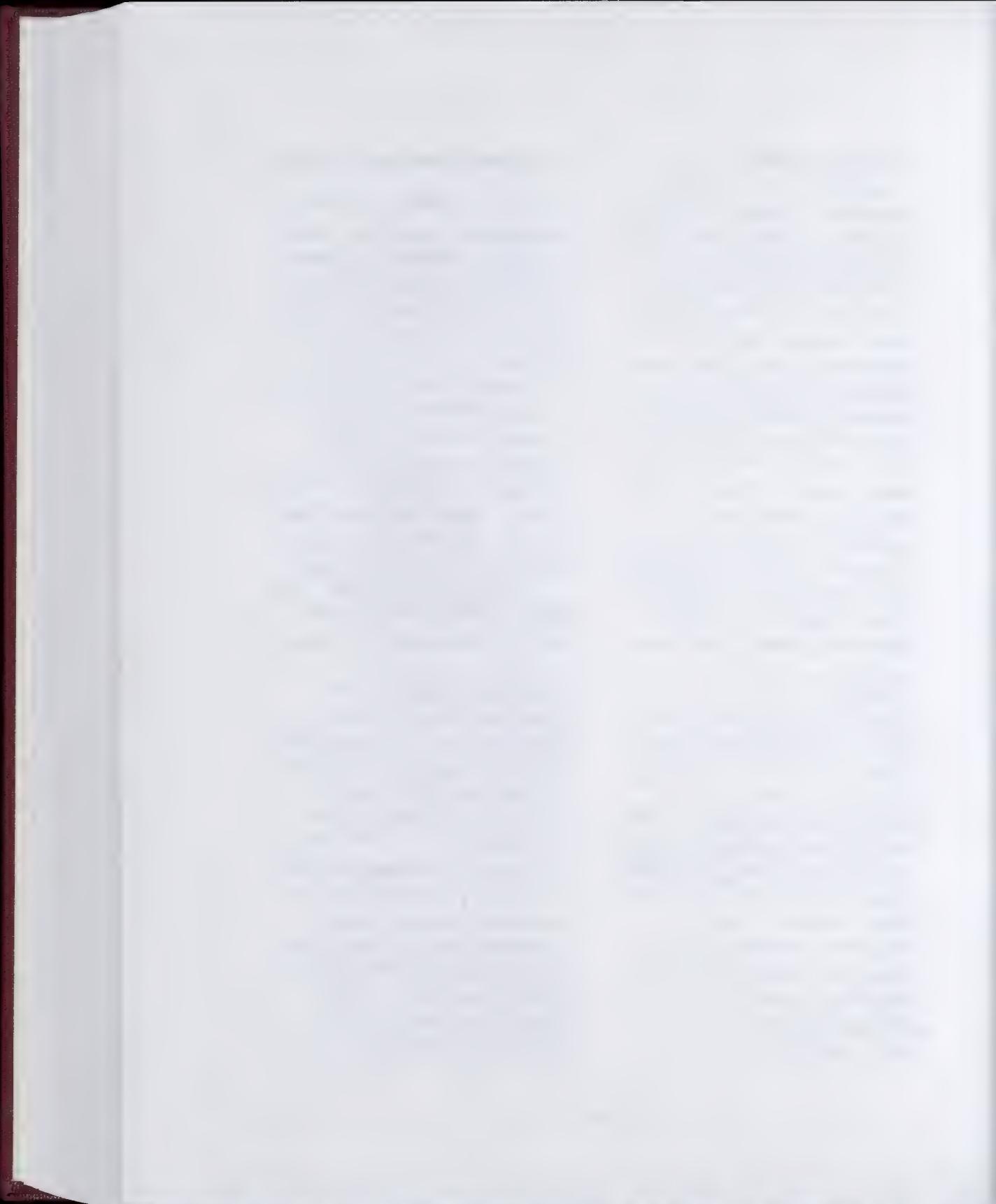
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